Community Gardens, Food Insecurity, and Neoliberalism

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

Philomena Engel

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Christine Shea

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

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Abstract

Food insecurity in the U.S. is a devastating issue that ties into similar issues of food waste and obesity. The rate of food insecurity in Delaware County, Indiana alone ranges from 16% overall to 20% for children specifically (Feeding America 2018). Community gardens have been promoted in recent years as an effective means to locally combat food insecurity, close open loops in local food systems, and introduce a more balanced economy overall to the local area. Although community gardens can be part of a suite of solutions for addressing food insecurity in the U.S., they alone cannot fix food insecurity, particularly due to their potential to entrench neoliberal policy. Under neoliberal capitalism, citizens are encouraged to provide individually for their own welfare as the government spends its capital and energy on sustaining economic market growth and providing profits to business stakeholders. Under this model, then, community gardens are promoted as a means for citizens and nonprofits to provide for themselves and allows city and state governments to further reduce social welfare budgets. The success and stability of these gardens, however, relies on citizens' own resources, knowledge, and skills, which can be difficult for low-income communities to sacrifice while trying to meet their own basic needs. Neoliberal capitalism also simultaneously conscripts community gardens as it promotes them, with governing institutions often perceiving them as temporary uses of currently vacant land, rather than permanent fixtures to inject nature and nutrients into low-income, low-access communities. Thus many U.S. families and communities cannot afford food, but political and economic institutions often do not consider it profitable or productive enough to provide food to these communities or to allow them to provide food for themselves. If one believes, as I do, that governments hold some responsibility for the welfare and safety of their citizens, forsaking that responsibility for capital gains and profits is a serious failing.

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Process Analysis Statement

From the beginning of this thesis, I knew that I wanted to conduct an ethnography on community gardens. I did not initially know that my thesis would include food insecurity so heavily as well — that was added after being raised as a concern by so many locals. Even back in February, however, which seems so distant now, I was contacting local organizations that sponsored community gardens to ask them when they planned on starting their gardening for the year. Once March arrived, and the inevitability of the COVID-19 virus's spread became clear, I decided to disregard the idea of doing an ethnography. Throughout March and April, I researched community gardens from the comfort and enclosure of my home. Because community gardens are so diverse, my research reflected this diversity. I read articles pertaining to community gardens from the disciplines of anthropology, psychology, public health, environmental management, economics, and politics. During those two months of research, I wrote quite a lot, but I was not able to shape this research into a thesis that I would be proud of. It remained a literature review, which I felt that 1) did not do justice to the topic of community gardens, 2) did not challenge me enough academically, and 3) did not allow me to truly utilize my undergraduate studies in anthropology.

For the above three reasons, I decided to significantly shorten my literature review so that it was truly just a literature review at the beginning of my written thesis. I once again reconceived my thesis, but this time as an ethnography again, albeit modified due to the circumstances. Starting at the beginning of May, and extending until after the end of June, I conducted ethnographic research by interviewing members of local organizations through email exchanges and phone calls. I found that this is a decent way to conduct ethnographic research given the situation, although I would never choose this form of ethnographic research if I had the option of speaking to people in person. For the unusual circumstances in which I was working, however, these methods sufficed. I began my research by contacting organizations I was already familiar with, such as the Ross Community Center and the Soup Kitchen of Muncie. Each organization that I contacted provided me with the names of several other individuals and organizations that worked on the same or similar issues, so my list of contacts quickly grew. This is particularly how I learned about local churches that contained community gardens — through the grapevine.

In this thesis, I have gathered perceptions regarding community gardens and food insecurity in Muncie, Indiana. I focus these perceptions particularly on how they are affected by neoliberal policy, which I explain more fully later. Although I have spent a significant amount of time on this project, there is certainly room for future Honors College students to expand on these topics. In fact, I actively encourage Honors students from various disciplines to consider the topics of community gardens and food insecurity for their own theses. There are some limitations with this

thesis as well that should be addressed. For one, as I have mentioned, I conducted my ethnographic research during the COVID-19 pandemic, and my research methods were limited due to this. Further, to truly gain an ethnographic understanding of the issues discussed here, I would have had to spend years interviewing individuals over multiple gardening seasons. That would have been far beyond the scope of an undergraduate Honors thesis, though.

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to assess the perceptions of local agencies in Muncie, Indiana regarding community gardens and food insecurity. I chose to study community gardens because the plurality of ways in which community gardens are created and maintained reflects the diversity of the communities to which they belong. Community gardens can provide myriad benefits and face many challenges, but they are special because each individual garden is both grassroots and unique in its nature, as well as being part of a broader movement.

My personal experiences with community gardens began in high school. I attended Mercy High School in Farmington Hills, Michigan, a Catholic, all-female high school. Every year, Mercy held Make a Difference Day, during which all students were required to do community service rather than attending classes. During my first year participating in Make a Difference Day, my group went to a community garden in Detroit to help plant seeds, weed beds, and mix the compost pile. I enjoyed the tactile experiences of gardening and the ability to be around soil and greenery in the heart of Detroit. I remember being personally shocked by the idea that food can be grown, tended to, given away, and eaten without money or markets being the basis for that exchange. Under neoliberal capitalism, in which individuals are expected to provide for themselves through labor, wages, or capital gains, growing food simply because people need to eat is a radical idea, and one that has stuck with me.

I am focusing on the ideas of community gardens and food insecurity as they pertain to Muncie, because I have enjoyed learning about the community surrounding me while attending Ball State University. My passion for volunteering and service continued from high school and I participated in Student Voluntary Services throughout most of my undergraduate studies. I was a Program Coordinator starting in my sophomore year, which entailed being the primary contact between a community agency and SVS, the university's main volunteer organization. I also performed the role of Treasurer for SVS during my senior year. During my time with SVS, I learned about many different community agencies in Muncie and the work that they do.

I learned even more about the Muncie community during the spring semester of my junior year, when I took an immersive learning course to start a nonprofit in Muncie, Beneficence Family Scholars. Beneficence Family Scholars is intended to serve single-parent families in the Muncie community, which I learned account for 20% of households in Muncie (U.S. Census Bureau 2020). I researched poverty and food insecurity in Muncie, and further researched the community agencies in the area, including ones that SVS does not partner with. Muncie has a plethora of community agencies that provide services to the Muncie community when individuals cannot provide them for themselves, and the Muncie government does not have the budget to do so. There are many nonprofits in Muncie that truly care about the resiliency and

health of this community, and they often work in tandem with each other to tackle the issues they are concerned about.

Although I am focusing on both community gardens and food insecurity, the goal of this thesis is not to prove that community gardens can solve food insecurity. They cannot do so, at least not in a sweeping, permanent, and self-sustaining way. The goal of this thesis is rather to focus on how neoliberal capitalism pertains to both community gardens and food insecurity. As will be explained later and throughout many examples in this thesis, neoliberal capitalism promotes community-driven initiatives like community gardens, but also constrains how they may exist and their capacity to provide benefits to the community. Community gardens are most often promoted when they are aesthetically pleasing and increase neighborhood property values, but their benefits regarding food insecurity, physical health, and mental health may be disregarded or seen as secondary benefits by institutions (such as governments) that primarily value economic productivity. Neoliberal policy also often creates food insecurity in communities, as evidenced by the example of Marsh Supermarkets explored later, and additionally constrains community-driven efforts to provide their own food. Everyone needs food. Everyone needs access to public green space in their community. Whether or not these are provided to communities should not be determined by their economic productivity alone. Ultimately, economic markets should be intended to serve people and improve their lives — not the other way around.

Methods

For this ethnography, I spent over two months conducting interviews through email exchanges, phone calls, and the occasional video call. I primarily interviewed individuals belonging to community agencies in Muncie, rather than the populations that those agencies serve. There are a couple different reasons for this. For one, I am writing during the COVID-19 pandemic. The easiest way to communicate with Muncie residents is through in-person interviews and I did not want to put Muncie residents at risk for a thesis that is intended to aid them. Even if I wanted to communicate with Muncie locals in a more distanced manner, I would need to first speak with them in person in order to ask for their email or phone number, so I would still need to put them at risk in some manner before I am able to interview them in a socially distanced way. By contrast, it is very easy to find such contact information for community agencies because it is often publicly available on Facebook or that agency's website.

Community agencies can offer valuable insight into issues facing the Muncie community, because they often have to understand and work around multiple angles of an issue. They must understand their community's needs and desires. They need to understand the legal boundaries within which they must operate. They also frequently need to have an understanding of the

socioeconomic reasons for poverty and food insecurity so that their proposed solutions make a tangible difference in the lives of Muncie residents. Because this is an ethnography, I am fully aware that it is incomplete without the ability to compare the perceptions of community agencies with those of the residents they are trying to serve. Due to the pandemic, however, it was simply not possible to communicate with Muncie residents in a way that maintains their safety as well as my own. Even though I focus on community agencies, I place a special emphasis on the Ross Community Center because I have personally volunteered with this agency and therefore have had several interactions with the population that the Ross Center serves. This agency is given some relative importance, then, because it is the only agency through which I interacted with local residents impacted by food insecurity during COVID-19.

Individuals who sponsored or organized specific community gardens were asked several questions about that garden in particular. Individuals from other community organizations that were related to food but did not contain a garden were asked about their overall perceptions of community gardens and food insecurity. These interview questions can be found in Appendix A. The reader may notice that none of the individuals were specifically asked about neoliberalism, even though it is included in my thesis. This is because the focus on neoliberalism was added after looking through my interview notes and noticing that many individuals conveyed the belief that their governments should play a greater role in ensuring family and community welfare. None of the individuals interviewed used the term "neoliberal" specifically, though. The emphasis on neoliberalism is the author's interpretation of interviewee responses.

What is a Community Garden?

A community garden is a garden in a public setting — often public in terms of ownership, access, and degree of democratic control (Ferris et al. 2001). The term "urban agriculture," also used throughout this thesis, is an umbrella term that includes community gardens, but can also include larger, commercially-oriented initiatives. The concept of community gardens should be broadly conceived to include many kinds of civic interventions with local governments and other public agencies partnering with citizen groups. The term "community" itself can take many forms and serve diverse interests, and community gardens reflect this pluralism and diversity (Ferris et al. 2001). Community gardens exist in many nations, in both rural and urban areas. They vary in what they offer, often according to local needs. Urban areas with uneven development may value more open space and greenery, which often reduces crime and increases the aesthetic value of the neighborhood. Areas with more food insecurity may value cheap produce from community gardens. With the increasing spread of cities and land scarcity, the demand for community gardens is growing. Now community gardening is an international phenomenon and is seen as a way of improving local food supplies as well as providing space for leisure and recreational activities (Ferris et al. 2001). Many urban gardens incorporate the social

aspect of sustainability into their work as well, highlighting community, health, children, food security, and poverty (Ferris et al. 2001).

A Brief History of Community Gardens in the U.S.

Community gardens have a different goal and origin than the similar allotment gardens in Europe. European allotment gardens have often had the singular goal of providing land for food production to workers, while American community gardens have had a variety of goals depending on the historical and social context of a particular garden.

Community gardens have been around in the U.S., with varying degrees of support, since the late nineteenth century. During the 1890s, social reformers began promoting using vacant lots as gardens to provide land for gardening and technical assistance for labor skills development for unemployed laborers in cities such as Detroit, New York City, and Philadelphia (Lawson 2005). Education reformers also began promoting the idea of community gardens, particularly as an interactive learning environment for school subjects, as well as to teach civics and good work habits (Lawson 2005). These two goals — education and social reformation — also coincided with civic beautification goals that encouraged women's groups, gardening groups, and civic groups to support vacant lot food production and school gardens (Lawson 2005).

During World War I, community gardens became more focused on increasing the domestic food supply so that more food could be sent to soldiers overseas (Lawson 2005). This goal continued through the Great Depression, with subsistence gardens becoming increasingly popular. The focus of community gardens — increasing food production for individuals and families — did not necessarily change during World War II, but the language certainly did, with "subsistence gardens" replaced by "victory gardens." Calling these community food relief efforts "victory gardens" suggests that they were intended to boost civilian morale during the war as well (Lawson 2005). Although victory gardens were promoted as a means of self-sufficiency, they were not neoliberal in nature. These gardens were paired with President Roosevelt's New Deal policies, and thus there was a more comprehensive social safety net for citizens to fall back on than merely their own labor and volunteerism. By contrast, community gardens exist today in a context of shrinking social safety nets, privatization, and individualism.

After WWII, the interest in community gardens and urban food production waned until about the 1970s. During the 1970s, a variety of social and environmental movements created a new surge of interest in community gardens and urban agriculture (Lawson 2005). Decades of uneven urban development had created generational poverty and food deserts in many inner-city areas. This urban development has often been race- and class-based, so that the communities hit the hardest were often of color and low-income. Additionally, this urban development had the effect of

devastating the urban environment. As social justice, environmental justice, and food justice concerns increased, community gardens were often reinstated with more radical goals of subverting the industrial agricultural food system, reclaiming space in the city, and providing food for oneself when one's government will not do so (Lawson 2005). These gardens were built as acts of resistance and to provide resources to address the myriad issues facing marginalized urban environments. These resistance-based community gardens have the most direct legacy to the vast variety of community gardens seen today (Lawson 2005).

Individual Benefits of Community Gardens

Participation in a community garden can provide gardeners with better access to food, particularly fresh produce. This benefit is most salient for low-income gardeners, who typically live in food deserts and may have little access to fresh produce otherwise (Wakefield et al. 2007). The improved access to fresh food also results in cost-savings for many families participating in community gardens, because they are able to use garden produce instead of store-bought foods (Wakefield et al. 2007). Alongside better access to food, individuals also benefit from improved nutrition. Consuming vegetables and fruits is known to promote health and prevent disease, but it can be hard for many low-income families and neighborhoods to access these foods, so community gardens provide an alternative food source that promotes healthy eating behaviors (Wakefield et al. 2007). Community gardeners and their households eat more fruits and vegetables and in greater quantities than non-gardeners. Additionally, as members learn how to grow fruits and vegetables, they often harness the skills from the community garden and use them in their own garden, increasing their supply of fresh produce (Wakefield et al. 2007).

Gardens can also encourage youth to try fruits and vegetables that they never had before. Consistent exposure to foods can help overcome dislike for them (Alaimo et al. 2016). The food system we are most familiar with is predisposed to present food as clean and uniform, with no visible connection to the place of production. For this reason, children may be initially less keen on eating foods that they have seen come out of the dirt. Children are also more sensitive to pathogens than adults and this is one reason many children have a dislike for vegetables, so this association could be more salient for the children if the food is home grown. Exposing them to these foods, however, both increases youth health and can help to overcome disgust or distaste for fruits and vegetables. Additionally, many gardens ban the use of pesticides and promote composting instead, so the decreased consumption of foods treated with pesticides is an important benefit for many gardeners (Alaimo et al. 2016)

Participating in a community garden also increases physical activity, especially for older individuals. Gardening takes energy and labor, but the environment is relaxed enough that older adults can go at their own pace (Wakefield et al. 2007). Gardening can contribute to the

fulfillment of weekly physical activity recommendations, especially during spring and summer months. One study found that 38% of gardeners consider their lifestyle very active, compared to only 20% of non-gardeners (Alaimo et al. 2016). For many, the gardens allow individuals to grow and consume culturally important foods. Many non-Western cultural foods are expensive and not very fresh at grocery stores, so being able to grow one's own produce provides people from different cultural backgrounds with an opportunity to express and celebrate their culture (Wakefield et al. 2007).

Many gardeners also benefit from improved mental health. Community gardens can be a space of tranquility, offering a chance to interact with nature and retreat from the urban environment in a calming and relaxing way (Alaimo et al. 2016). Gardeners often engage with the soil and with others, creating a feeling of collective purpose. They feel safe, accepted, valued, and part of the broader community. Moreover, those with recovery goals related to mental health can pursue those goals in an everyday environment rather than one that is illness or deficit-oriented (Alaimo et al. 2016). Watching plants grow can have therapeutic effects. Participants are often fascinated, and feel compelled to give a task their whole attention (Alaimo et al. 2016). They experience "being away," the feeling of being removed from otherwise stressful thoughts or environments (Alaimo et al. 2016). They notice the capacity of the gardening environment to draw in people through its richness (Alaimo et al. 2016). They also experience compatibility, the way in which the participants fit into the surroundings and appropriateness of the tasks (Alaimo et al. 2016). Participants report experiencing enjoyment from seeing plants grow, feeling responsible for them, being fascinated by their progress, and having a sense of control over them (Alaimo et al. 2016). Interacting with nature can also be an important motivating factor. Gardening can enforce a sense of self-worth and appeal to the human spirit alongside benefiting physical health. Many community garden participants, such as retirees or immigrants, may be isolated otherwise and interacting in the garden can be incredibly important for the mental health of these populations.

Even more than providing food and space, community gardens can alter motivations and behaviors in a way that promotes health in individuals. Community gardening can influence internal processes, like self-efficacy, attitudes, autonomous motivation, and preferences toward health behaviors, which can influence diet and activity in turn (Alaimo et al. 2016). Although many benefits of community gardens are recognized in research, individuals are often driven by intrinsic motivations and tactile sensations. Even if community gardens are used as an intervention to promote public health, the energy and motivation for change must still largely originate from within an individual. The will to change behaviors requires both intrinsic motivation and well-internalized extrinsic motivation (Alaimo et al. 2016). This requires the key concepts of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Individuals must feel at once that they are the originator of their actions, that they are capable of achieving the desired outcomes, and that they are connected to others through the actions they are taking because the actions are important

to others (Alaimo et al. 2016). Many are familiar with the idea of the social amplification of risk, in which institutional structures and social-group behavior contribute to risk consequences. Community gardens might work in the other direction, socially amplifying health-promoting behaviors across neighborhoods and communities. Urban gardens can also provide an opportunity for clinicians to work with patients, community leaders, and other public health practitioners to address chronic diseases, underlying health conditions, and health behaviors such as mental health, weight gain, etc. (Alaimo et al. 2016).

The health-promoting behaviors of urban gardens can be seen in the health statistics of gardeners and non-gardeners. Community gardeners typically have a lower BMI and a lower risk of being overweight or obese compared to non-gardeners (Alaimo et al. 2016). A link between participation in community gardens and diabetes control has been found among immigrant men and women. Gardeners also typically have reduced levels of stress hormones as well as increased feelings of social inclusion, community connections, contact with nature, relaxation, and tranquility (Alaimo et al. 2016). Participants in community gardens also often develop a preference for home-grown produce rather than store-bought foods. Many have said in interviews that they do not like to buy certain foods at the supermarket when they feel as though they could grow them at home (Wakefield et al. 2007).

Participation in an urban garden can also offer opportunities for acquiring skills that enable self-sufficiency. This speaks to the numerous economic benefits that gardens can provide. By participating in an urban garden, someone could improve their own food security or supplement their food budget with fresh produce for personal use or sale. In one study, 31% of individuals reported “sometimes” or “frequently” worrying about running out of food in the past month, but that dropped to 3% after participation in a community garden (Carney et al. 2011).

Interpersonal Benefits of Community Gardens

Community gardens can be instrumental in improving interpersonal relationships in a given neighborhood or community. They are a prime space for social interaction. The ability to share with friends, family and neighbors food that one had grown themselves is important to all gardeners, but especially low-income gardeners (Wakefield et al. 2007). Gardeners do not just share material items with each other, like food and tools, but also immaterial ones. Many gardeners in interviews of other studies have mentioned the potency of being able to share ideas across cultures and social differences (Wakefield et al. 2007). Community gardens often lead to increased neighborhood and social interaction, support, and involvement. They can generate collective efficacy and social experiences, which can in turn foster access to social resources and social learning and create meaningful social roles (Wakefield et al. 2007).

Additionally, having a safe green space, especially in a neighborhood prone to poverty, drugs, or crime, can be a huge factor in increasing community pride. Community gardens can also be sites of civic action, providing an impetus for broader community improvement and mobilization (Wakefield et al. 2007). Community gardens provide good meeting places for local residents, even to discuss non garden-related issues and to engage the broader community (Wakefield et al. 2007). Behavioral settings like urban gardens often require active and sustained participation and can lead to deeper engagement in civic life. Direct participation and social engagement promotes individual ownership of and commitment to the garden structure, enhances community engagement, and empowers residents to get involved on a variety of civic issues (Alaimo et al. 2016). Urban gardens can facilitate social organization and increase the community's capacity for accessing resources and social learning. This builds trust and reciprocity, which are necessary for promoting collective action and informal social control (Alaimo et al. 2016). Finally, urban gardens actualize social networks as a way to achieve desired social and health outcomes, such as public order and health promotion. Community gardens do so by promoting pro-health and pro-social behaviors, increasing access to health-related facilities, and managing neighborhood physical hazards and risky conditions (Alaimo et al. 2016).

Finally, urban gardening can also be an empowering experience for the community surrounding it. Garden-based programs can help build self-esteem through the development of skills. Individual sense of pride can be extended to the wider community and urban gardens themselves are thought to increase attachment to the community (Wakefield et al. 2016). Finally, gardens not only enhance connections across the community but also the physical features of the community by clearing debris and taking over vacant lots to provide a place of beauty and natural connection (Alaimo et al. 2016).

Environmental Processes: Green Spaces & Health

Community gardens can improve mood by providing a valuable way to pass the time, relax, and feel a sense of accomplishment. For residents, they instill a sense of connection to the food-growing process, attachment to the places where they garden and where they live, and overall feelings of joy, pride, purpose, peace and awe (Alaimo et al. 2016). Gardening can influence life values, such as deepening one's relationship with food and caring for their food and bodies (Alaimo et al. 2016). Some gardeners report spiritual benefits through connections with nature (Alaimo et al. 2016). They experience stress reduction by generating environmental knowledge and promoting everyday engagement with one's surroundings. Urban gardens have also been found to have a contagious effect — residential lots near community gardens are better kept than ones near vacant lots (Alaimo et al. 2016). This shows further the amplifying effects of community gardens, which can contribute to the health and safety of the entire neighborhood or community, rather than just a parcel of it.

Concerns and Challenges for Community Gardens

Community gardens, despite the myriad benefits they can provide, face many barriers and limitations to being able to provide those benefits more permanently and securely to urban communities. The first and perhaps most prominent challenge they face is insecure land tenure. Urban gardens are often located on sites not directly owned by the gardeners, and the gardeners must face concerns over whether they will have access to the land in the future. This is due to a persistent perception by local governments that community gardens are a positive but temporary use of currently vacant land. Gardeners often face zoning restrictions and are only allowed short-term leases. There can also be competition for use of the land by developers and conflicting stakeholder goals that they must contend with. Many local governments have trouble designating the legal status of urban gardens, establishing supportive zoning laws, and integrating gardens into urban planning and land use policy discussions. It can be upsetting for gardeners when they put their labor and time into a garden and grow attached to the space, only for them to learn that the site is going to be redeveloped for a more "economically productive" purpose. The uncertainty that many gardeners face over their access to land can be detrimental to mental health, increasing stress and the feeling of having a lack of control. When the site of an urban garden is slated for other development purposes, gardeners feel as though their needs are not appreciated or considered by decision-makers.

Another issue that urban gardens face is the impact of environmental disturbances on the quality of their produce. Many gardeners face barriers in being able to test the soil they use for gardening. Since many gardens are near current or former industrial and commercial facilities, there is a high chance that the produce grown is contaminated by lead or other heavy metals and pollutants. Current garden sites may be exposed to current or former waste incineration, coal and oil combustion, historic uses of leaded gasoline and lead-based paints, construction, car traffic, pesticides, etc. Gardeners see an intimate connection between the quality of the local environment and risks to their own health that non-gardeners may not appreciate. Many urban gardens attempt to counter contaminated soils early by testing the soil and taking remediation steps, such as using raised beds or doing in-situ treatment. Not all urban gardeners are aware of the risks that lead exposure entails, though, or they may face barriers in testing the soil.

Finally, support for community gardens is fundamental but often lacking. Many urban gardens need improved infrastructure, sometimes even including access to gardening tools and water. For some gardens, accessing a water spigot and being able to pay the water bills is a challenge. Other gardens face limited water availability due to drought. Many low-income gardeners in particular find it difficult to commit their own resources to the garden and must ask for outside help in implementing urban gardens.

Gardens also face limitations in that the benefits they provide cannot be solely provided to a community through urban gardens. Community gardens alone cannot solve community health issues, eliminate hunger, or replace the need for systemic and comprehensive public policy. Urban gardens are just one piece of the fabric of community health and local food systems. The scope of garden benefits are further limited by a lack of direct attention to mitigating unequal access to the resources surrounding community gardens and urban agriculture. Although community gardens are helpful to a local community, food insecurity and hunger mitigation strategies are needed that address poverty directly through wages and economic development.

Neoliberalism & Community Gardens

Before discussing the effects of neoliberal policy on community gardens, it is necessary to discuss neoliberalism per se, particularly by contrasting it with the immediately preceding economic theory in the U.S.: Keynesian economics. Keynesian economics predominated in the U.S. and Europe from the end of WWII until around 1980, with the elections of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. This economic theory was developed by John Maynard Keynes, and it stood in direct contrast to classical liberalism.

Classical liberalism supported the *laissez-faire* attitude regarding government intervention in the economy. After the Great Depression and the first two World Wars proved that a "hands-off" approach would not necessarily lead to financially secure economies and moral societies, Keynes was able to introduce his theory of economics, which required government intervention for the security of employees and the stabilization of the business cycle. Under Keynesian economics, the level of economic activity is determined by the level of aggregate demand (Palley 2004). There are periodic weaknesses in this aggregate demand generation process, however, which results in unemployment (Palley 2004). These period weaknesses are also known as recessions or depressions, and many students of economics know this cycle as the business cycle. Keynesians believe that monetary policy (controlling interest rates) and fiscal policy (controlling government spending and taxes) can stabilize this cycle (Palley 2004).

There are two different kinds of Keynesian economics which must be discussed if the rise and impact of neoliberalism is to be fully understood. American Keynesian economics, also known as neo-Keynesianism, subscribes to the theory of income distribution that employees are paid what they are worth by the laws of supply and demand (Palley 2004). European Keynesians, also known as post-Keynesians, believe that institutional factors also affect income distribution, so a laborer's relative bargaining power will also affect their wages, in addition to supply and demand (Palley 2004). Under post-Keynesianism, initiatives such as labor unions, minimum wage laws,

employee rights, etc. are natural corrections of market failure. To neo-Keynesians, however, they are market distortions.

The intellectual divisions among Keynesians and the cognitive dissonance of neo-Keynesians, who enjoyed unions and minimum wage laws but also believed them to be unnecessary, helped provide an entry point for neoliberalism to rise (Palley 2004). Other factors contributed to the theoretical switch as well. The Vietnam War and the OPEC oil price shocks of the 1970s created cultural and economic uncertainty, for example (Palley 2004). The Cold War also played a significant role in the cultural change as well, because collective economic activities (such as unions or boycotts) became associated with communism, and so did any assertion of the limits of market capitalism (Palley 2004). As author Palley (2004) points out, Keynesian success may have also led to the undoing of Keynesian economics. As U.S. citizens enjoyed rising prosperity throughout the twentieth century, many came to believe that issues of income distribution and mass unemployment had been solved, and that there is no longer a need for institutions (such as labor unions) that provided this pre-supposed prosperity in the first place — especially as these institutions became ideologically (and arguably, falsely) identified with instances of poverty observed in the USSR and China (Palley 2004). Neoliberals also attacked the Keynesian-era goal of using government intervention policies to provide full employment to society. Neoliberals asserted that the market will naturally self-adjust to provide full employment, because it would not allow valuable resources, such as labor, to go to waste (Palley 2004). Because of this, government interventions to raise employment are merely market distortions and can only lead to increased inflation or higher unemployment under neoliberal theory (Palley 2004).

Two of the main tenets of neoliberalism are related to income distribution and aggregate employment determination. Regarding the first, neoliberals believe, as neo-Keynesians did, that factors of production (such as capital and labor) are paid what they are worth through the laws of supply and demand (Palley 2004). Regarding the second, neoliberals claim that free markets will not allow resources such as labor to go to waste, and that the market will naturally self-adjust to provide full employment (Palley 2004).

Although these may be the theoretical tenets of neoliberalism, neoliberalism has departed from theory in its policy applications. As the first neoliberal policy-makers were coming into office in the 1980s and 1990s, they initially abandoned the Keynesian goal of fine-tuning the interest rate and instead focused on targeting the money supply (Palley 2004). This resulted in massive unemployment rates, a rise in global interest rates, and increased market volatility (Palley 2004). The market did not automatically self-adjust to provide full employment, as neoliberal theory had claimed it would. In other words, neoliberal theory was proven to be an inadequate account of the market system from its first applications.

Neoliberals quickly abandoned their monetarist experiment and returned to Keynesian interest rate adjusting, although with different policy goals than under Keynesianism. Rather than trying to provide full employment through the market system, neoliberals instead began using the rhetoric of a "natural rate of unemployment" (Palley 2004). This "natural rate" has served two different purposes. First, it provides political cover for higher average unemployment rates, which has reduced the bargaining power of workers (Palley 2004). Many U.S. citizens now primarily engage in the political economy as consumers rather than as democratic citizens or workers, which drastically reduces the collective power of citizen laborers. The "natural rate" rhetoric also provides a rationale for keeping real interest rates higher than averages under Keynesian economics, which benefits wealthy individuals and the financial sector (Palley 2004).

Another Keynesian policy that neoliberals have had to return to is stabilization of the business cycle. Although it is a tenet of neoliberal theory that government intervention in the business cycle is a market distortion, this tenet has also proved untenable as neoliberal policy-makers have had to stabilize business cycles using the same monetary and fiscal policy measures for which they criticized Keynesian economists (Palley 2004). Even when stabilization is the correct answer, however, it has been applied suboptimally and opportunistically by neoliberal policy-makers. In 2001, for example, President Bush implemented tax cuts to help the economy survive the recession. These tax cuts were directed at America's most wealthy population, however, providing "less economic bang per buck" and they were permanent, even though only temporary tax cuts are needed during a recession (Palley 2004).

Neoliberal supporters also have consistently promoted labor market deregulation. Under a capitalist economy, employers are encouraged to decrease the price of production as much as possible, including the price of labor. Since the implementation of neoliberal policy, the real value of the minimum wage has fallen, unions have been undermined, and there is now a labor market climate of employment insecurity (Palley 2004). The result of these has been widening wage gaps and income insecurity. Neoliberals would claim that this is because people are now being paid what they are "worth," while post-Keynesians would claim that it is because the balance of power in labor markets has tilted toward businesses (Palley 2004).

I would have to agree with the post-Keynesian analysis on prudential, humanitarian grounds. I have worked jobs that pay the federal minimum wage, which is not enough to live on in the U.S. Was I really unworthy of a living wage, and by logical extension, unworthy of living? Even if I were, my inability to maintain my life and livelihood would, and in some communities has, cause economic collapse -- emaciated laborers cannot produce effectively. Are food-insecure families in the U.S. simply not worthy of being paid a wage that allows them to buy healthy foods? Even if so, the economic and public policy costs of interfering with the market to provide healthy food and health care for people on poor diets likely harms gross economic prosperity more than

paying living wages. I refuse to believe that any human being is "worth" less than they need to live. Since the inception of neoliberal capitalism, household wages have stagnated or fallen while the prices of essential goods and services have dramatically risen. It would be cruel to use neoliberal policy to assume that most Americans are simply unworthy of stable housing or affordable medical care.

As I have pointed out, although we live under neoliberal policy in the U.S., it is a bastardized form of neoliberalism. The actions taken in the name of neoliberalism are directly contradictory to its theoretical basis, because its theoretical basis, as has been shown, cannot adequately account for the social and moral embeddedness of the market system in the first place. Even when neoliberal theory must bow to Keynesian techniques, its applications are skewed to benefit wealthy elites at the expense of middle-class and lower-class laborers. Now that the rise of neoliberalism has been explored, authors Ghose and Pettygrove have examined the effects of neoliberal policy on community gardens in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Some of their findings are reproduced here.

By closing open loops of food systems in cities, urban agriculture can reduce resource use and help introduce a more balanced economy. There is much research advocating for urban agriculture, but little exploring the limitations or adverse effects of such interventions. Ultimately, urban agriculture has both radical and neoliberal elements. Urban agriculture has the potential to entrench neoliberalism or exacerbate forms of social injustice and exclusion (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). By implementing urban agriculture programs, state and city governments are more easily able to continue shrinking the social safety net as more nonprofits and community groups fill the void (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). Urban agriculture is radical in its enduring association with grassroots movements seeking to oppose the dominant food system (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). Yet it is neoliberal in that urban gardening projects must function within neoliberal structures of society and in doing so, they must reproduce and further entrench certain aspects of that framework. In refusing to acknowledge and accept these contradictions in urban agriculture, we fail to utilize its transformative power.

Urban agriculture and community gardens are spaces of democratic citizenship and radical political practice. By constructing and maintaining community gardens, residents can provide more food to their community and claim rights to the city that they live in. Broader discussions of citizenship practice, however, "challenge the notion that citizenship participation is inherently transformative or empowering, particularly in the context of neoliberal economic restructuring" (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). Neoliberalism is "characterized by free market trade, deregulation of financial markets, privatization, individualization, and the shift away from state welfare provision" (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014 p. 2). Authors Ghose and Pettygrove (2014) examined the "impacts of community gardens on citizenship practice and the effects of volunteerism on the

development of community gardens." The authors particularly explore how grassroots community gardens simultaneously contest and reinforce neoliberal policies.

Urban community gardens are sites of contestation. Residents construct them out of concerns regarding food insecurity, poor urban environmental quality, and political marginalization of minority populations (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). Gardens have been praised for enabling citizens to grow their own food and participate in shaping their environment. Community gardens have become spaces through which citizens can contest dominant power relations and proactively claim rights to the city (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). As Ghose and Pettygrove (2014) argue, however, citizen participation is not inherently transformative or empowering. In the context of neoliberalism, citizen participation is a component of collaborative governance used to reduce the state's responsibility for providing social services (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). Citizen volunteers are often compelled to fill welfare deficiencies resulting from lapsed government spending (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). There is a need, then, to explore urban community gardens as spaces of citizenship practice in the marginalized "inner city," where gardens are predominantly responses to diminished local urban food environments and high levels of urban land vacancy.

Neoliberalism is the dominant policy influence at all levels of the U.S. government. At the urban scale, neoliberalism promotes collaborative governance models that encourage citizen participation and volunteerism (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). Because of these neoliberal practices, basic welfare has waned and the rights traditionally afforded by citizenship only accrue to individuals who voluntarily work for them (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). Those who do not participate may be perceived as undeserving of citizenship rights. This conditional citizenship is "legitimized by linking citizenship practice and volunteerism to discourses of place-making, empowerment, and local autonomy" (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). These practices are individualistic because they promote self-help, but also communitarian because they draw on notions of participation in a community (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). The neoliberal conceptions of citizenship narrow the terms and scope of political participation.

Resource-poor minority communities are disproportionately burdened by state welfare retrenchment, "which compels communities to compensate through voluntary or grassroots community development projects" (Ghose & Pettygrove 201 201 The capacity to participate in voluntary organizing or formal government processes varies contextually, however, so not everyone has available opportunities for participation (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). As Ghose and Pettygrove state, the "rhetoric of collaborative governance simultaneously obscures and reproduces race and racism as ongoing principles of society through discourses about individual responsibility and the supposed color-blindness of market-based systems" (2014 p. 2). Citizens practicing localized community development can thus become complicit in constructing

neoliberal hegemony, because they are acting as neoliberal citizen-subjects who alleviate the state from its duty to provide services to its citizens (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). “Neoliberalism effectively disciplines marginalized citizens and their participating organizations” (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014 p. 2). These citizens and organizations are formally independent of the state, but they rely on or compete for state funding, and “may become ‘arms’ of the state, serving to translate state policies to non-state practices” (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). Grassroots organizations can become increasingly pragmatic and less politically confrontational due to the necessities of competing for scarce resources and the increasingly greater demands for social services (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014).

In the neoliberal city, community gardens can also act as localized strategies to combat the effects of the neoliberalization of food systems (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). They provide an alternative to food welfare reductions, urban food insecurity, environmental degradation, and urban disinvestment. They can be locales for grassroots citizenship practice and place-based community development (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). Community gardens have the capacity to “challenge hegemonic ideologies, resist capitalistic relations, and assert rights to space for citizens marginalized along race and class lines” (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). They are a way to reclaim the urban commons to resist or provide alternatives to capitalist social relations.

Although community gardens can clearly provide many benefits, they can also constrain citizen participation. “Neoliberal policy discourses promote neighborhood or community development, rather than interaction with the state, as the main channel of political engagement” (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). This impacts inner-city residents because “the terms upon which they are allowed to be visible and the avenues available to them to participate in political deliberation and dissent are increasingly defined in terms of their own abilities to govern themselves as a community” (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014 p. 12). Inadvertently, organizers of community gardens support the hegemony of neoliberal governance by alleviating the state of its responsibility to provide social services and reinforces the “legitimacy of conditional citizenship, under which rights extend solely to individuals who voluntarily claim them through formal political participation or community-based organizing” (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). This participation, however, requires access to material resources and knowledge. Individuals' and communities’ abilities to participate vary because organizational capabilities, social connectedness and resource access vary contextually (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014).

Developing community gardens produces opportunities for some residents but these remain constricted by the broader structural conditions of political and economic inequality. Volunteerism can require extracting material and labor resources from already resource-poor citizens, who struggle to fulfill basic survival needs (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). Establishing a community garden is not easy — one must navigate various political, economic, social, and

environmental concerns. “The opportunity for grassroots community garden development exists, but the ability to take advantage of the opportunity depends on having knowledge acquired through specific channels,” and sometimes on developing relationships with specific nonprofits (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). These organizational connections can benefit community gardens, but they can also be preconditions and thus barriers to success. “Groups with relatively good access to material resources can more easily develop community gardens, while those with poor resource access may be unable to afford basic infrastructural needs” (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). Each group relies on its own knowledge, social connections, and skills to acquire resources, so there is no guarantee that all groups will be equally successful.

Some of the neoliberal constraints imposed on community gardens come from city policies themselves. As authors Ghose and Pettygrove (2014) explain, Milwaukee’s Department of City Development (DCD) has created a set of complicated rules and bureaucratic hurdles for marginalized neighborhoods rather than simplifying the process of establishing community gardens. These are not unique to Milwaukee — quite a few cities and townships have similar policies as the ones outlined below. Primarily, however, they require citizens to go through a specific gatekeeping nonprofit (Groundwork Milwaukee) to establish community gardens, and there are severe rules and restrictions regarding what a community garden can and cannot have in Milwaukee.

The DCD constrains community garden development in multiple ways, but still characterizes community gardens as a community asset. This tentatively indicates that community garden development may be a way to reduce the abundance of vacant lots in cities like Milwaukee (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). The DCD also emphasizes, however, that “citizen use of public land can lead to unwanted or unproductive activities,” so the gardens must be carefully vetted and monitored (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). Milwaukee is considered a leader in urban agriculture, but the city carefully distinguishes urban agriculture as a “commercial enterprise that attracts investment, research, and technological innovation” (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). “Community gardens, from the DCD’s perspective, are a small-scale ad hoc form of community development that must be monitored, rather than an activity to be actively pursued and promoted” (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). The benefits are not considered particularly advantageous to the city, except where particular gardens are well-developed and artfully designed. In other words, the DCD and the City of Milwaukee only seem to care about the aesthetic value of gardens and their relationship to neighborhood property values (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). They have shown not only disinterest in, but disdain for alleviating food insecurity and other barriers facing marginalized low-income neighborhoods.

This demonstrates the failings of neoliberalism quite well, which both encourages citizens to alleviate their own sufferings through activities such as community gardens and simultaneously

considers those benefits not worthwhile compared to further market growth (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). The result of this is that the state will not provide social services to citizens, and it will make it very difficult for citizens to attempt to provide those services for themselves. Permitting urban community gardens while strictly regulating where and how they can exist could be a government strategy to retain control of space while still appeasing citizens (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). More broadly, the "simultaneous promotion and conscription of citizen participation is a mechanism by which the neoliberal government disciplines citizens to accommodate rather than confront the state" (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). Many garden organizers thus have a conciliatory stance towards the government, not regarding it as a threat but as a potential ally whose support they need to earn. This is partly due to the lack of any direct governmental challenge to community gardens, but also partly due to resignation on the part of the organizers.

Because of the neoliberalization of the market, Milwaukee values commercial development rather than community gardens for its vacant lots. The city promotes larger, commercially oriented farming initiatives while merely tolerating community gardens on vacant lots used by marginalized populations. "City policy reinforces classed and racialized notions of an ideal urban form, in which vacant lot gardens are a survival strategy for the urban poor," while other forms of urban agriculture are considered innovative development (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). Community gardens and other forms of contemporary food activism "cultivate neoliberal citizen-subjectivity by conditioning participants to behave as consumers and to pursue change through individual endeavor" (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). Others counter that even where actions do not produce conflict or opposition, participation can still enable individuals to negotiate alternative meanings of citizenship and cultivate alternative political imaginaries (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014). Community gardens for the most part, however, do not overtly challenge existing power relations. Participants endeavor towards localized change in terms of food production, community building, and environmental revitalization. By emphasizing improvement through individual effort, though, they "reinforce the neoliberal tenet that citizenship (including the rights to material reproduction and participation in decision-making processes) should be earned through active participation" (Ghose & Pettygrove 2014).

Project Background

This section includes both the historical background and the ethnographic background of community gardens and food insecurity in Muncie. The historical background includes a brief description of the history of Muncie, including the historical reasons for poverty and evidence of food insecurity. The ethnographic background discusses the organizations and individuals whom I have interviewed, including the roles and scopes of the organizations and community gardens. It also includes a brief discussion of the relationships and networks between community agencies in Delaware County.

Historical Background

This section will discuss the history of poverty and food insecurity in Muncie. The Western history of Muncie begins in the 1770s, when the Lenape people, also called the Delaware tribe, were invited by the Miami people to settle near the White River after being pushed westward by the expansion of white settlers ("City of Muncie History"). The Lenape spoke the Munsee dialect, so the area became known as Munsee Town ("City of Muncie History"). The area was originally ceded to the granddaughter of Miami Chief Little Turtle, and the Miami Nation has a long pre-colonial history in Ohio and Indiana ("City of Muncie History"). In 1818, however, the Miami and their Delaware guests were forced to cede the land to the federal government after signing the Treaty of St. Mary's ("City of Muncie History").

Muncie was incorporated in 1865 as an agricultural settlement and the name was changed from Munsee Town to Muncie ("City of Muncie History"). The discovery of natural gas in the area in the 1870s sparked the industrial boom in Muncie. Many industrial businesses moved to the area to start factories, including the Ball family. The Ball Brothers Glass Manufacturing Company moved from Buffalo, New York to Muncie, Indiana and began manufacturing glass as early as 1888 ("City of Muncie History"). Agriculture continued to remain important for the region, but industry dominated for the next century. Interestingly, even though natural gas sparked the industrial boom, that gas was not used very economically and natural gas was depleted by around 1910 ("City of Muncie History"). By the time the gas boom had ended, however, Muncie was already established as an industrial center with several factories and railroads nearby ("City of Muncie History").

A notable date in Muncie's history is the opening of the East Indiana Normal School in 1899 ("City of Muncie History"). This school closed and then reopened under a different name several times until it was finally established as Ball State University in 1965 ("City of Muncie History"). While there have been some tensions and distance in the past between the university and the Muncie community, Ball State's current President, Geoff Mearns, is committed to ending this divide.

During the 1920s, Muncie also became a hub for Ku Klux Klan activities, with strong membership among Muncie locals during that decade ("City of Muncie History"). Scandals among leadership and division among members led to the decline of the KKK in Muncie, though ("City of Muncie History"). Racism in Muncie endured, however, especially due to racist housing policies. Many Muncie subdivisions had racial covenants specifying that non-whites could not own property in these neighborhoods and were only allowed in these neighborhoods as domestic servants (Preston 2017). Even though many of these covenants were legally

unenforceable by 1948 due to the Supreme Court *Shelley v. Kraemer* decision and the 1968 Fair Housing Act, they had important ramifications for race and generational wealth in Muncie (Preston 2017).

The ability to own property, particularly in the 1950s, was an important step for securing a middle-class lifestyle. This ability was severely curtailed for Black people in Muncie, who had to contend with a history of redlining, a history which has a prominent legacy today (Preston 2017). By now, white property owners in Muncie have benefited from generations of home equity gains, while Black residents have been shut out of this generational wealth (Preston 2017). Whitely and Industry neighborhoods still today have the highest concentrations of Black residents, with a combined 25% white population (Preston 2017). The neighborhoods immediately outside of these, Morningside and Eastside, are 95% and 88% white, respectively (Preston 2017). Bryan Preston has also explained that there appears to be some local white amnesia regarding this history, while Black residents are well aware of it:

> Some (white) local historians I spoke with about such covenants were not aware that these policies had been in effect in Muncie. Meanwhile, the local African-American homeowners, young and old, non-historians, who I spoke with were well-informed about such restrictions and the attendant injustices and historical legacies. Who is permitted to forget about such policies? And who has no choice but to remember? (Preston 2017).

During the Great Depression, Muncie managed to stay afloat primarily due to the philanthropy of the Ball Brothers Foundation, who donated funds for new construction at Ball State and Ball Memorial Hospital ("City of Muncie History"). Muncie also remained economically viable in part due to their participation in the victory garden movement during the first and second World Wars. By 1918, 7,050 victory gardens were planted in Delaware County (Flook 2020). Because of the Ball glass factories nearby, Muncie locals were also able to participate in canning the foods that they grew (Flook 2020). Gardening declined during the 1920s, but revived again during the Great Depression. In 1931, the Muncie Community Garden project employed 300 Muncie citizens to garden a 35-acre plot of land donated by Warner Gear (Flook 2020). This project helped to provide food and reduce unemployment during the Great Depression.

Any description of Muncie's history is not complete without discussing the Middletown Studies. Robert and Helen Lynd, along with a team of sociologists, began studying Muncie in the early twentieth century ("City of Muncie History"). They called it "Middletown" to emphasize that their research focuses on a typical American city ("City of Muncie History"). The Center for Middletown Studies still exists today and sociological research in Muncie continues, although primarily under Ball State University ("City of Muncie History").

Industry in Muncie remained strong during WWII and mostly aimed to manufacture goods for the war effort. During the postwar Keynesian era of U.S. economics, Muncie thrived. Muncie was a booming industrial town for most of the twentieth century, but industrial trends began changing in the later twentieth century when neoliberal policies were first being implemented. Ball Corporation first closed its glass manufacturing plant in Muncie in 1962, leaving many working-class residents without a job ("City of Muncie History"). Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, other corporations and industries followed suit, outsourcing their labor to countries where they can pay laborers more cheaply rather than paying the wages and pensions required by U.S. law ("City of Muncie History"). Some factories remain in or near Muncie, but not enough for Muncie's economy to rely on industry as it once did.

Poverty

The closing of factories had a tremendous impact on Muncie residents. Many neighborhoods in Muncie, especially those south of the train tracks, were traditionally filled with proud, working-class residents. These residents historically only needed a high school diploma in order to attain a stable job that paid a living wage and a pension. Now their way of life — the way of life of their grandparents and great-grandparents — is gone. It is difficult, if not impossible, to get a decent job with only a high school diploma. Those without Bachelor's degrees are often penalized in our society. Even so, college is not always seen as an attractive option, either. It is prohibitively expensive for many, and the culture of these neighborhoods does not always value a college education because of the long history of not needing one to succeed.

Without a Bachelor's degree, however, the only jobs available in Muncie are retail and service sector jobs that primarily pay the minimum wage, which is not enough for an individual or family to live on. The highest-paying jobs in Muncie are those at the university and those at the hospital, which both require a college education and employ a significant number of people living outside of Muncie. In short, the Muncie economy was built to rely on industries and factories which supplied jobs with living wages to working-class residents. Now that working-class jobs that pay a living wage are gone, however, many Muncie residents have fallen into poverty. In many families and neighborhoods, this has turned into generational poverty.

According to Urban Ventures, generational poverty is "defined as a family having lived in poverty for at least two generations" (2020). Generational poverty has many differences to situational poverty, in which a family grew up middle class and their income was decreased due to a situational change (such as a death in the family or job loss). In addition to living in financial poverty, those in generational poverty also experience educational poverty, parental poverty, and spiritual poverty (Urban Ventures 2020). The combination of these kinds of poverty can create the feeling of hopelessness in families under generational poverty. As Urban Ventures states,

"Without hope and the belief that life can be better, the motivation and energy needed to break the cycle are very low" (2020). Also, families under generational poverty are more focused on immediate daily survival than long-term planning (Urban Ventures 2020). Their concerns are often finding shelter or food for today, which curtails their ability to plan for the future. This is also partly because the concept of planning requires the belief that an individual has control over their life, something that families in generational poverty are not guaranteed (Urban Ventures 2020). Finally, the values associated with generational poverty are quite different from middle-class values. Values associated with poverty will focus more on survival and short-term needs, and may even be counterproductive, such as families passing down a low emphasis on education (Urban Ventures 2020).

Food Insecurity: Free & Reduced-Price Lunches at Muncie Schools

When asked about the issue of food insecurity in Muncie, many residents pointed to the number of students eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch programs within the Muncie Community Schools. As of August 2019, South View Elementary School had a Free and Reduced-Price Lunch rate of 93%, which was the highest in the MCS district (Slabaugh 2019). The lowest rate in the school system was West View Elementary at 61% (Slabaugh 2019). In fact, the need is so high that the Muncie Community School district applied for the Community Eligibility Program for the 2019-2020 academic year and was accepted (Rao & Merkel 2019). This program provides breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost to the student or their family. This means that students do not have to worry any longer about filling out applications for free lunches, or concern themselves with their lunch account balance or debt (Rao & Merkel 2019). This is also not a financial burden on the school district, because they are reimbursed at a certain rate for every child that receives a meal (Rao & Merkel 2019).

In order for a school district to be eligible for the Community Eligibility Program, at least 40% of students need to be "identified students," which refers to those students whose families use SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid, students who are on the Head Start program, and students who are homeless, foster children, or migrants (Slabaugh 2019). For all lunches to be claimed as free under the Community Eligibility Program, a district needs to have 62.5% or more identified students (Slabaugh 2019). In the Muncie Community Schools district, 68.82% of students are identified students, which is the third highest rate among traditional school districts in the state of Indiana (Slabaugh 2019).

MCS also provides meals to students during the summer, and has been working to provide meals during the pandemic as well. Chartwell, a company under Compass USA, takes care of school meals during the academic year and has been providing meals during this summer, transporting them to families using the school's buses (Slabaugh 2019). Several residents have mentioned

seeing these buses give out meals to students ever since MCS closed due to COVID-19. During the school year, they were able to give away what would normally have been school meals, helping families with children to stretch their food budgets while they were unable to work. They have continued this program into the summer. In fact, it was actually the Chartwell company that informed the MCS district of the Community Eligibility Program in the first place, because they have had experience with it in other school districts that they supply food to (Slabaugh 2019).

This program has the potential to reduce obesity in Muncie, because the breakfasts and lunches are intended to provide a certain amount of necessary nutrition for the students (Rao & Merkel 2019). It is a sad and ironic truth that obesity and food insecurity accompany one another in the U.S., because the cheapest foods available are also the least healthy ones. Obesity can be caused by family history, behavioral lifestyle, environment, culture, biological issues, or medical illnesses, but it is most commonly caused by poor dietary habits (Rao & Merkel 2019). These habits often develop in families with limited resources, who cannot afford fresh produce on a regular basis (Rao & Merkel 2019). Obesity results in physical, social, and emotional complications for children as they grow up, and it is an economically expensive public health crisis to treat (Rao & Merkel 2019). It makes more sense to invest resources in preventing obesity, by ensuring that children can grow up with a healthy diet, rather than investing our resources in treating obesity while ignoring the causes.

Food Insecurity: Marsh Supermarkets

When asked about the issue of food insecurity in Muncie, many local residents also referenced the 2017 closing of the Marsh Supermarkets. I researched this event independently in order to understand how it occurred and the impact that it had on the city and its food resources.

Marsh Supermarkets was founded in Muncie in 1931 by Ermal Marsh (Cohen & Stansell). He managed to keep the company afloat during the Great Depression, and began expanding the company in the 50s, adding new store locations across Indiana (Cohen & Stansell). Marsh thrived financially throughout the twentieth century, but came into new financial troubles in the early 2000s. Don Marsh, the son of Ermal, had taken over as president of the company in the later 1900s, but he was accused in the early 2000s of using company funds for his own private vacations and personal use (Whoriskey 2018). In 2006, Marsh Supermarkets was bought by the private equity firm Sun Capital Partners through a leveraged buyout (LBO) (Whoriskey 2018). At first, Sun Capital Partners' control of Marsh was beneficial, and the company initially had more money as the private equity firm cut corporate management costs (Whoriskey 2018). After the 2008 recession, however, Marsh was steadily on the path to bankruptcy. Sun Capital and its investors made their money back by selling off the Marsh corporation in pieces.

I had to do some further research to understand what an LBO entails. Sun Capital Partners, in order to purchase the Marsh company, took out a loan to cover most of the cost (Patriot Act 2020). Sun Capital Partners then put the debt from the loan onto Marsh Supermarkets itself (Patriot Act 2020). Over the next decade, especially after it became clear that Marsh would become bankrupt, Sun Capital Partners continued to profit from Marsh, even as the Marsh company was in debt. Sun closed Marsh stores and sold the real estate, and liquidated nearly all of Marsh's assets (Whoriskey 2018). When the Marsh stores closed in 2017, the company had only 44 stores remaining and almost no assets (Whoriskey 2018).

Marsh Supermarkets went bankrupt in 2017. The bankruptcy courts found, however, that Sun Capital Partners was not responsible for the debt they had taken out to purchase the company, not responsible for Marsh's bankruptcy, and not responsible for the former Marsh employees' pensions (Whoriskey 2020). This essentially allowed Sun Capital Partners to gain Marsh's market value as liquid assets at no cost, dismantling any productive and food security benefits provided by Marsh stores along the way. The only remaining liability, pensions, was handed off to the government agency Pension Benefit Guaranty Corp., which is not paying the employees as much as they were promised originally (Whoriskey 2020). The PBGC has even said that they themselves will run out of money in the next decade (Whoriskey 2020).

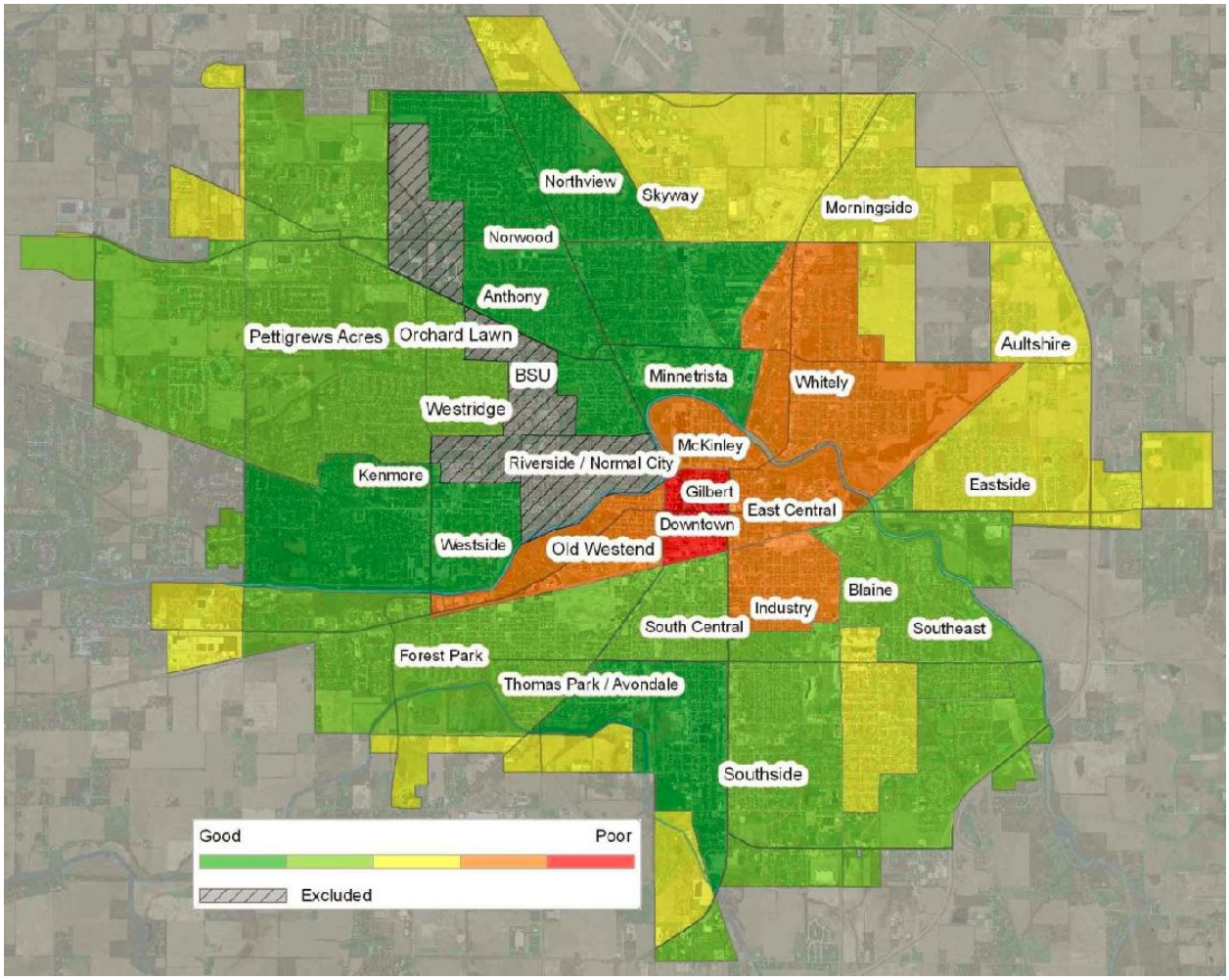
Unfortunately, this event was not a one-time bad decision on the part of Sun Capital Partners. Between the years of 2005 and 2008, Sun Capital Partners bought five different companies, all of which went bankrupt around the year 2017 (Whoriskey 2020). The same strategy, a leveraged buyout, was used to purchase all of these companies (Whoriskey 2020). The private equity firm received loans to buy public companies, saddled those companies with the debt, and then slowly liquidated the assets of those companies over the next decade until they went bankrupt (Whoriskey 2020). This is a predatory and exploitative practice, which has dangerous ramifications for the economy, and which is unfortunately entirely legal. Public companies are being bankrupted to benefit private investors. This private equity firm is intentionally extracting funds from dying enterprises using a questionable financial practice, and then using the cover of bankruptcy to avoid any obligations to employees or their pensions (Whoriskey 2020). Between all five companies, if Sun Capital Partners had to pay the pensions of the former employees, they would owe $280 million, thus massively increasing the viability of this strategy (Whoriskey 2020).

Following the bankruptcy of local Marsh stores, the food landscape of Muncie was drastically changed for the worse in a way that served to enrich private investors but was nonetheless legally condoned. Since 2017, Muncie has had new grocery stores come in, including Fresh Thyme and Kroger's Payless stores. All of these new grocery stores, however, are located along McGalliard and Tillotson, two of the main roads in Muncie's North Side. The locations for current grocery

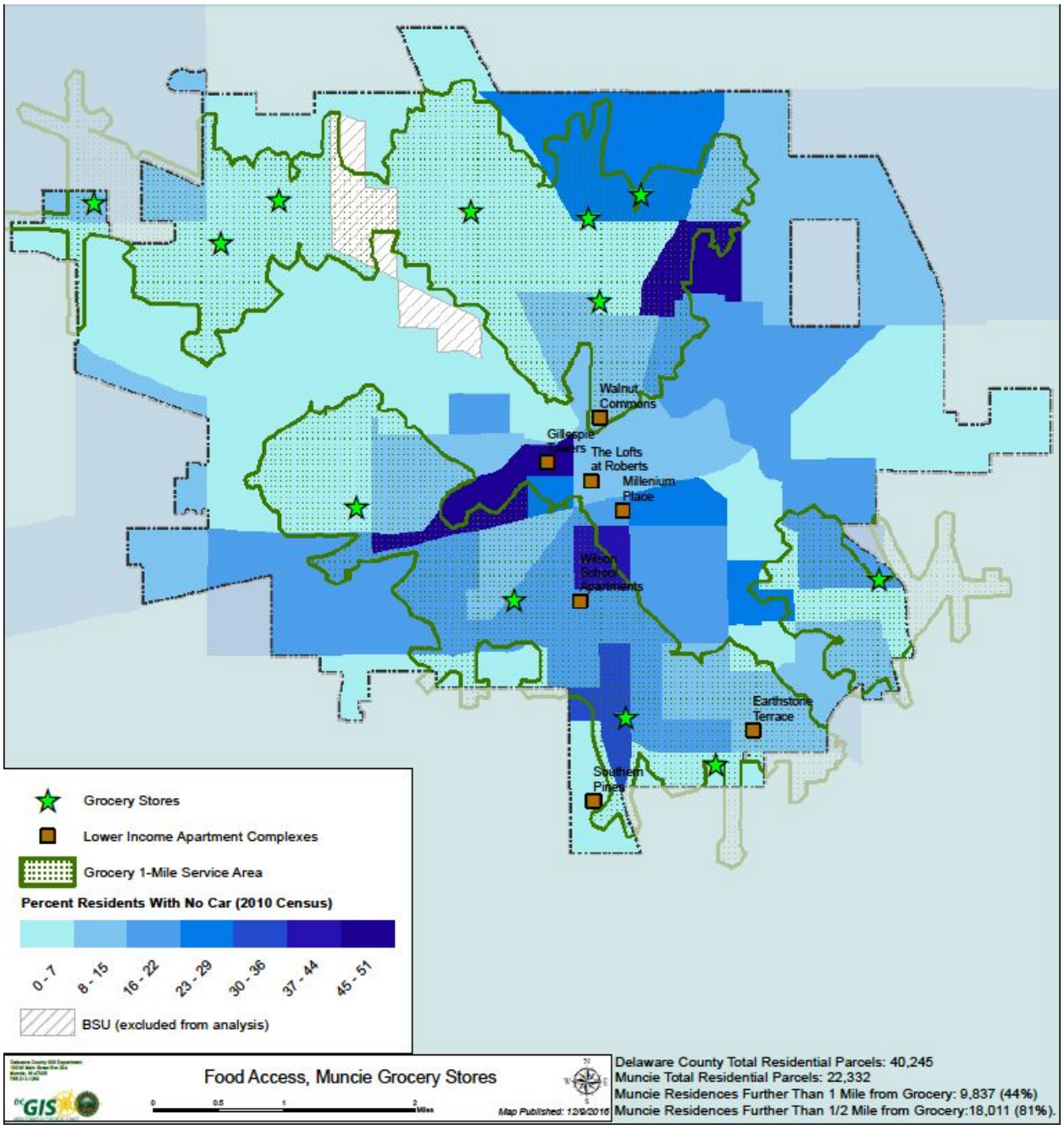
stores in Muncie are not very accessible to residents on the South Side, whereby McGalliard is about three miles from the nearest part of South Side. The best option for South Side residents becomes the Walmart on the South Side, or gas stations and corner stores. The Muncie Indiana Transit System (MITS) buses will take residents to the Walmarts on the north and south side, but if residents do take the MITS bus (or bike or walk), that limits the amount of groceries they are able to take home with them. If they work long hours, the buses might not be in operation during the time that the parents are available to get groceries. Further, if a family has children that they must take care of, this limits the resource of time even more. The following maps, courtesy of Dr. Gruver at Ball State, provide a fuller understanding of how food insecurity impacts Muncie.

Multiple residents have mentioned to me that there is a great need for grocery stores at the former Marsh locations on S. Hoyt Ave., S. Burlington Dr., and N. Walnut Ave. Using the City of Muncie's Geographical Information Systems (GIS) data, available through the city's Beacon portal, I was able to look up those properties and identify their current owners. The owner of the S. Hoyt Ave. location is Trent Overhue, the owner of Northern States Investments (NSI), LLC. Overhue also owns the former Marsh location on Bethel, which he has turned into a storage unit under his other company, Affordable Family Storage. I reached out to him to ask about any current or forthcoming plans for the S. Hoyt Ave. location, but he has not responded. The owner of the S. Burlington Dr. location is Compendium Property Group, LLC. I have reached out to this company as well regarding their plans for this location, but they have not responded either. It was unusually difficult to find the N. Walnut Ave. location on the city's GIS data search or its current owner, so I have not been able to contact the owner of that location.

In addition to the individual property owners, I also contacted the Building Commissioner and the Mayor of Muncie, Steve Selvey and Dan Ridenour, respectively. I have relayed to them the information that many Muncie residents see adding grocery stores in these locations as a high priority for reducing food insecurity in the city. I asked them about their plans for the geographical spread of grocery stores in Muncie to reduce food deserts. I also asked them about the process of attracting a business to the city and how the city and that business decide on a location. I hope that they respond to these inquiries so that I have a better understanding of how food deserts form before I make suggestions for mitigating them, but community agencies have responded more promptly than the City of Muncie's government. Therefore, the solutions detailed later reflect their perspectives and experiences more than the perspectives and experiences of individuals working in the city government.

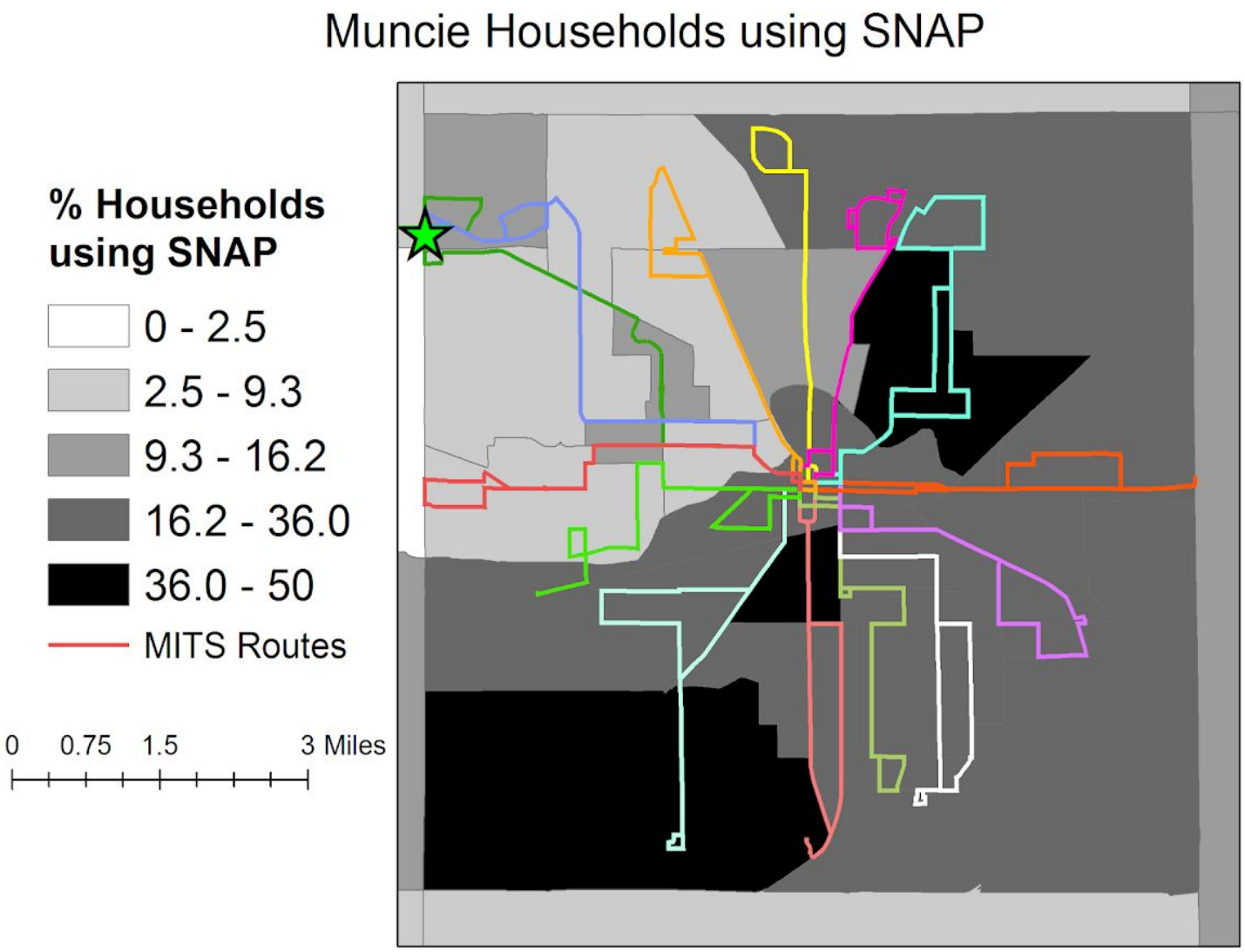


Food Insecurity in Muncie. Source: Preston 2010



Spatial concentration of grocery stores[1] and low-income apartments in Muncie, 2016. Courtesy of Dr. Gruver.

[1] Note that this map was created before Marsh Supermarkets went bankrupt.



Munce households using SNAP compared with MITS routes. Courtesy of Dr. Gruver.

The 8Twelve Coalition, a coalition of residents and organizations in the Thomas Park-Avondale and South Central neighborhoods convened by Habitat for Humanity, is invested in food insecurity in the area. They have discussed the idea of pressuring the City of Muncie to adopt a policy that would require a certain square footage of grocery stores to be dedicated to fresh produce, as some other locales have. The 8Twelve Coalition has also been exploring options for the former Marsh location on Hoyt. Since the Marsh closed, they have been trying to replace it with another grocery store so that residents in the area have better access to healthy foods. They have been working for the past few years to get access to the building and start a grocery store, but their plans have not been able to materialize. One reason that they cannot acquire the building is because the profit margins for grocery stores are actually very low, and they do not have the resources to attract a for-profit grocery store. The correspondent with whom I spoke

mentioned that she had never known why Walmart's model works so well (for profits, not necessarily for consumers or employees) before researching the market data on grocery stores. Thus the current owner of the Marsh building or the City of Muncie may hesitate to initiate plans to build a grocery store for economic reasons.

This is a further demonstration of how neoliberal policy fails citizens at the expense of an immaterial, abstract "market." The economic market is intended to serve those who participate in it, but we are now asking citizens instead to sacrifice their own needs — namely, food — because it is not "economically productive" enough to provide it to them. Regardless of the finances involved, people need to eat — even if the grocery stores providing that food will not contribute significant economic benefits to the City of Muncie. The responsibility of a government is to ensure the safety and well-being of its citizens, not to require its citizens to provide for their own safety and well-being while curtailing their abilities depending on how "marketable" their efforts are. Our city and state governments have a responsibility, then, to figure out how to manage both the market and food system in such a way that food can still be provided to those who need it. This could perhaps come in the form of subsidies to grocery stores, or working more closely with nonprofit agencies in Muncie already discussing these issues, such as those that are part of the 8Twelve Coalition.

For their part, the 8Twelve Coalition has not given up on their plan, and they are still exploring options. One idea that they are considering is partnering with Second Harvest to start a grocery store. The store would be divided, with some items available as food pantry items, and other items available for purchase. Building Better Neighborhoods, with Ball State University, has expressed excitement and support for this plan. The 8Twelve Coalition has also considered (and perhaps these two plans may merge together) a store that supplies items which people could purchase through the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program. Open Door, a health services provider in the South Side of Muncie, is the main WIC provider in the area, so 8Twelve is also considering partnering with them for this idea. Having a store that provides items that are available through WIC may be a good idea for bringing more fresh produce to Muncie families as well. Another woman with whom I have spoken, a local Muncie resident who is involved with the Ross Center, mentioned that WIC is a great help for her in providing fresh produce for her daughter, because a certain amount of her monthly WIC budget is intended to be spent on produce. She even allows her daughter to pick out what she wants, and at a very young age the daughter is developing a taste for which vegetables and fruits she enjoys.

Ethnographic Background

This section will discuss Ross Community Center, community gardens in Muncie, and the relationships among community agencies in Muncie. A special emphasis is given to the Ross

Center, because it is the nonprofit with which I have the most personal experience. For the same reason, it is also the only nonprofit through which I have interacted with local residents and have heard some of their sentiments regarding food insecurity and community food relief efforts.

Ross Community Center

The Ross Community Center was originally founded by the City of Muncie as the Garland E. Ross Recreational Center in 1974. It was one of three recreational centers in the city, alongside the Roy C. Buley Center and the S. Madison Center. The Buley Center is now part of the Boys & Girls Club of Muncie. These recreational centers were strategically placed in proud working-class neighborhoods, with Ross being in the Thomas Park-Avondale neighborhood. Ross Recreational Center was originally a vibrant recreational center that reflected the needs and desires of the mostly-white working-class neighborhood.

When the Muncie-based industries left, such as the Ball glass factories and the Borg Warner automotive factories, the entire Muncie economy was affected. Muncie had a booming economy throughout the twentieth century, but the basis of this economy — the factories — was outsourced to other countries and insourced to U.S. inmates. This left working-class families and neighborhoods devastated. The Thomas Park-Avondale neighborhood fell into poverty, which has turned into generational poverty, now in its third or fourth generation. The Ross Center continued to be a recreational center, but it also started to become a place where kids could hang out. One current employee of the Ross Center grew up in the neighborhood, and spent his childhood playing basketball in the gym. As the city began losing its economic footing, however, the Ross Center began deteriorating and the neighborhood association took over. The neighborhood association kept the athletics and sports that were originally part of Ross's mission, and they also began feeding programs. The building, however, continued to deteriorate.

The 2008 global recession hit Muncie hard, like many other small towns. Then-Mayor McShirley was forced to make budget cuts to keep the city economically viable. In 2009, the Buley Center became a nonprofit. In 2011, the Ross Recreational Center became the nonprofit Ross Community Center, although their nonprofit status was not finalized until 2013. It is generally called the Ross Center. When the Ross Center became a nonprofit, their mission changed. While they still focus on sports and recreation, their mission is to advance education, health and wellness through their programs, activities and services. They offer baseball, basketball, judo, and various other athletic opportunities to local youth and adults. Ross even hosts major judo tournaments at Southside Middle School. Additionally, the Ball Brothers Foundation has chosen the Ross Community Center as a Concentrated Focus Model to become a catalyst for revitalization on the South Side of Muncie. With the help of the Ball Brothers

Foundation, the Ross Center has been able to strengthen its operations, upgrade its building, and has been adding more sports fields, which will be completed by 2021.

In addition to recreation, however, the Ross Community Center became more focused on building and revitalizing the community through programs and services. They intend for their programs to reach a diversity of ages. Ross has created programs for babies, preschoolers, elderly adults, as well as other adult and youth programs. They provide after-school programs for children that include reading and homework help alongside time for play and activity. They also host a weekly Community Market, through which they give out boxes of food to families, who line up in their vehicles to promote social distancing. I have volunteered with the Ross Center's after-school programs and their Community Market, so I have some personal experience with these programs.

Dr. Jacqueline Hanoman, the current Executive Director of the Ross Community Center, joined the Center after it had become a nonprofit. She was needed to implement their current plan to become a catalyst for neighborhood revitalization, as well as reconceptualize the plan when needed. Hanoman is primarily concerned with converting the Ross Center from a recreational center to a true community center. She has discussed her frustrations that the after-school programs are mostly attended by children outside the neighborhood because neighborhood parents find the educational programming to be too structured. Services like the Community Market before the pandemic drew in more people from the immediate neighborhood. During the COVID-19 pandemic, people from throughout the city and beyond come to the market. Her main concern is that the needs and the desires of the community do not go hand in hand and are difficult to meet simultaneously. As Hanoman sees it, the community needs a space for learning, athleticism and creativity. The community, however, only desires athletics out of these. This may be in part due to the fact that the neighborhood is historically working-class. Before this neighborhood fell into poverty, an individual only needed a high school diploma to succeed in life. They could then get a job at one of the local factories, which offered secure employment, a living wage, and a pension plan.

When these factories left, a cultural mismatch was created. A neighborhood that has historically only needed a high school education to succeed in life must now find new ways to be successful. The tried-and-true methods of their grandparents unfortunately no longer suffice. In Dr. Hanoman's view, learning, reading, and creative inquiry are those tools for success. For many families, however, education is seen as a chore and a burden more than an opportunity. When I have asked children to do additional homework as an after-school volunteer, they often become emotional. Some claim that if their teacher did not explicitly assign the work, there is no value in doing it. Other children become genuinely worried and fearful that their teacher would become angry with them if they were to do unassigned work, because that could be perceived as not

following their teacher's directions. When the Muncie Community Schools closed, they began sending homework packets to students' homes. Hanoman has called neighborhood parents to offer tutoring services over the phone or through online formats, and many parents have not only rejected her offer, but have become frustrated and annoyed with her for asking.

Dr. Hanoman cares greatly about the educational achievement of children, both those in the neighborhood and those who attend the Ross Center. She is worried about different children in the same grade who have entirely different reading levels due to their teachers and their family structure. Hanoman is a highly educated woman who sees the value in education and the success that it can bring, but the Thomas Park-Avondale neighborhood has historically not needed such an education and has responded to her enthusiasm with skepticism.

There is a mismatch between the neighborhood and the Ross Center for other reasons as well. Many of those who grew up in the neighborhood and used the Ross Center as children have become upset at how quickly and how much has changed since Dr. Hanoman has arrived. Hanoman herself has discussed that the building was rather deteriorated when she first arrived, and she has done a lot of work to revitalize the center. More so than the appearance, however, some parents are upset that the structure of the Ross Center has changed so much. For these people, the Ross Center was primarily a place where they could freely play basketball or baseball, and it was loosely structured. Under Hanoman, Ross's services and programs have become a lot more structured, and many parents (especially those who are still skeptical about education) do not want to subject their children to extra work that they do not perceive as providing benefits.

Dr. Hanoman has also discussed how it is difficult for neighbors living in poverty to trust each other, and I have seen some of this during the Community Market. The other people waiting in line become angry if they believe someone has "cut" in line. This reaction is typically reserved for people they do not know, though. There are plenty of alternate examples of individuals walking between each others' parked vehicles to chat with each other before the Community Market starts. Despite these tensions that can occur, the Community Market is quite successful. Hanoman prefers to have at least 150-160 boxes of food to give away, and sometimes the volunteers still need to make more. The other interns and volunteers at the Ross Center write down how many family members are in each vehicle (which often contain multiple families each, because many people carpool), so that bigger boxes can be given to larger families, and vice versa. About 50 people or more are served by the Community Market every week once these numbers are added up.

There have been a few exceptionally hot days during which fewer people attended the Community Market. I worry that as the summer continues and the weather becomes hotter, this

trend might continue as well. People line up in their vehicles to attend the Community Market, and it is quite typical that by the time I arrive at the Ross Center around 1pm, there is already a line of cars formed even though the market itself does not start until 4pm. It is difficult for individuals, especially older individuals, to sit in their hot cars for hours. Dr. Hanoman often makes rounds to give out water and food to those who have been waiting for a long time while boxes are still being packed, but they still cannot leave to go to the bathroom. Due to COVID-19, Hanoman cannot allow them to use the Ross Center bathroom, and originally, some feared that other individuals in line might not let that person return to their original spot if they leave to use a gas station bathroom. Thus many were initially disincentivized from leaving, because they do not want to have to go to the back of line after they have already been waiting in line for hours. This trend, however, has changed dramatically as people have gotten to know each other better. Individuals in line are more willing to let others park and leave their cars to walk elsewhere, or even leave with their cars and come back to the space. Additionally, several people are now bringing their lawn chairs with them so that they can gather under the trees near the baseball fields, eating and drinking together. Two weeks ago, some people attending the Community Market even celebrated a birthday by gathering in this way. The Community Market has itself become somewhat of a community-building space.

The demographics of the Community Market are quite varied, although I typically see more older adults than any other age group. The donations that the Ross Center receives does not always match what the people attending the Community Market need. Donations of diapers and formula for infants have been common recently, but the Ross Center has received fewer donations aimed for older adults. A few of the individuals who regularly receive food from the Community Market have mentioned to Hanoman that they need more protein due to their age, so she has started sectioning off protein drinks to hand out to older adults.

Dr. Hanoman is also multilingual, which is beneficial when a family attends the Community Market that primarily speaks Spanish and she can effectively communicate with them. This also helps to promote the dignity of these families, an issue that Hanoman cares about greatly. Another way that she tries to promote dignity is by having some food options that families can choose for themselves, often including milk, eggs, and fresh produce. This engages them in the process more than handing each family an identical box of food. Hanoman frequently says that the efforts of the Ross Center are not charity, but “friends helping friends.” Part of the reason she is adamant about this point is because “charity” can have negative connotations, often seeming as though those giving to charity are superior in some way to those receiving charity. The Ross Center is not a charity, then, because Hanoman does not look down on the individuals that the Ross Center serves.

At the start of this summer, the Ross Community Center started the Rose Park Garden next to the center. There is currently a neighborhood garden down the road from the Ross Center at the Avondale Church with a sign saying that the plots are there for the community. This garden was started by the 8Twelve Coalition in Muncie. The man who lives next to the plots often cultivates them and gives the produce away to the community and various nonprofits, one of the main beneficiaries being Blood and Fire Ministries. I have been told, however, that many local residents feel discouraged from interacting with this garden due to this individual's reserved demeanor.

The garden at the Ross Community Center is not considered by Dr. Hanoman to be a true "community garden," because the Ross Center will take the responsibility of planting and cultivating the garden rather than relying on neighborhood volunteers to do so. Anyone who wants to will be allowed to come and take produce within reason, and neighbors are encouraged to volunteer but not obligated. Hanoman has three primary reasons for starting the Ross garden. The first is to produce food for the neighborhood and for the Community Market. The second reason is to provide a place of beauty for the neighborhood, where residents can find enjoyment and tranquility. The third reason, and the ultimate goal for Hanoman, is to provide a space of unification. She would like the garden to foster physical, mental, and emotional health and well-being, and to be a place where people can come together through beauty and food.

Rose Park Garden. Photo taken by Phil Engel 2020.

Dr. Hanoman is also reluctant to call the Rose Park Garden “charity,” because she values the dignity of those who use Ross’s services and she feels that the term “charity” undercuts that dignity. She has made it clear that she does not want to grow vegetables with the attitude of, “Oh you poor people, you need vegetables.” She would rather the neighbors feel dignified, which would in turn likely encourage their participation in the garden. I participated in building the garden, which had around ten raised wooden-frame beds and two stone keyhole gardens the last time I had seen it. Because this is the first year of the Rose Park Garden, I cannot make any assessments regarding its sustainability or success. I can say, however, that Hanoman is a committed woman who has done quite a lot of research into the neighborhood she serves and this fact makes me hopeful about the future success of the Rose Park Garden.

Rose Park Garden from the other side. Photo taken by Phil Engel 2020.

Other “Community” Gardens

The word “community” must be put in quotes for this section, because not all of the garden organizers that I have spoken to consider their gardens to be community gardens. I am including all of the gardens in this section, though, because they are all intended to serve or benefit their community in some way. As will become evident throughout these examples, faith-based communities in Muncie are taking the lead in the community gardening movement.

The Mission Garden at the College Ave. United Methodist Church (pictured below) is not considered a community garden by the church members who tend it, but it is intended to serve the community. The garden has been in operation for four years, and it was built on a vacant lot, where a house had once stood, across the street from the church. The church saw that there is a need for food locally, so they started a garden on the now-vacant site. Their first year they harvested about 1150 pounds of produce, 1700 to 1800 pounds in their second year, and last year they harvested about 2600 pounds of food. The gardeners at the Mission Garden do not consider

it to be a community garden because the church manages it. The church controls the quality of the garden and produce, but they welcome volunteers from the neighborhood, Ivy Tech Community College, and Ball State University.

College Ave. United Methodist Church Garden. Photo taken by Phil Engel 2020.

Another local church which has a garden is the Hazelwood Christian Church. The garden is in operation right now during the pandemic, and they have almost completed all of their planting for the season. They mentioned that they are delaying a small portion of the planting with the goal of extending the harvesting time, so that they do not harvest a lot of the same crop at once. This garden plants everything in one large plot, and they do not use containers or raised beds. Everything that is planted is edible, except for marigolds that they plant around the perimeter for pest control. There are eight congregants from the Hazelwood Church who do most of the work on the garden, but a few other members assist with additional tasks, such as one congregant who is a farmer and brings his tractor to do spring plowing.

Hazelwood Christian Church Community Garden. Photo taken by Phil Engel 2020.

Most of their produce is delivered to charitable organizations that provide meals or groceries to the local community, such as Muncie Mission, Christian Ministries, and the Soup Kitchen of Muncie. People in the surrounding neighborhood and the employees of the Parlour Salon (located on the same property as the church) are invited to harvest what they would like as well. In past years, some produce was made available to congregants on Sundays, but they have not been able to hold in-person services recently due to the pandemic. The correspondent I spoke to hopes that their doors will reopen sometime during the harvest season, but they have not set a date to do so yet. The Hazelwood Church, in contrast to the Mission Garden, considers their garden to be a community garden even though it is primarily worked by church members. The gardener I spoke to mentioned that the Hazelwood Church has a lot of land with which they can expand their garden, but they currently lack the labor to do so. Part of this is due to the fact that most of the properties surrounding the church are occupied by Ball State students, who are in Muncie temporarily and may not feel invested in spending their time on projects like community gardens.

Another local church with a community garden is the Riverside United Methodist Church. This garden is in operation right now, and they primarily plant produce. The garden coordinator told me that they believe the garden serves the community when I asked whether this is a community garden or not. People from the neighborhood can bring plants or seeds, and the Riverside Church gardeners will plant and maintain them. When the plants are ready to be harvested, they are shared with the neighborhood and the congregants, and excess produce is donated to food pantries. In recent years, they have planted peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, pumpkins, cauliflower, carrots, and cantaloupe, although I was informed that the cantaloupe was often stolen.

There is also a garden located at Motivate Our Minds, although I have not been able to contact the organization, so I am unsure if they consider it to be a community garden. They primarily use the garden for education, along with their other educational programs. Motivate Our Minds was started in 1987 by Mary Dollison and Raushanah Shabazz, who wanted to provide the children of the Whitely neighborhood with an educational boost. It initially began in Ms. Dollison's living room, and only included reading education, but it has expanded greatly over the last thirty years. Affectionately called "MOMs," the nonprofit now provides a variety of educational after-school programming, much of which they have integrated with gardening activities. Using their garden, they are able to incorporate entrepreneurship and gardening skills as well as art, math, nutrition, and science. Community partners associated with MOMs are also working to build another garden at their location along Highland Ave.

Muncie also has an Urban Garden Coalition. The UGC started several years ago, originally as the Urban Garden Initiative under Muncie Delaware Clean & Beautiful. The group disbanded for a few years, but then around 2016 or 2017, some people got back together and created the Urban Garden Coalition. In their own words,

> The Urban Gardening Coalition offers a place for gardeners and organizations to connect, share resources, and work together toward common goals that advance urban gardens in our community. It's a relaxed group, filled with friendly gardening enthusiasts of every skill level and all are welcome (Muncie-Delaware Clean & Beautiful).

The UGC held monthly meetings until the COVID-19 outbreak in Muncie in March. The group was focusing on hosting educational speakers during 2020 to learn more about gardening, and becoming more sustainable by defining duties for officers. They were to elect officers once roles were defined, but the group has not met since February so this has not happened.

In the last year, MDCB and UGC had decided that UGC had become its own entity, so the group was working on 501(c)(3) status or finding another group to umbrella under. It has been

operating as an unincorporated organization otherwise. Many of those locally involved in UGC represent community gardens that donate food to people who need fresh produce, such as the East 16th St. Church of God Community Garden, the Motivate our Minds Community Garden, the Albany United Methodist Church Community Garden, the Corinth United Methodist Church Community Garden, the Maring-Hunt Library Community Garden, and others. When the group was still meeting, they would share garden experiences and education and further develop the group. They would also, however, be present at local seed swaps and seedling swaps, such as at the Muncie Public Library. They would host booth space with educational and marketing information and fundraising games, such as at the Plant Sale and Enchanted Luminaria Walk, both of which are held annually at Minnetrista. The group would also share work days or resources (such as compost) with each other. In 2018, a few UGC members helped work at the Friends Memorial Church garden, and they have also helped build and develop a new garden at Motivate Our Minds.

The 8Twelve Coalition is not exclusively focused on community gardens, but they have built and supported various community gardens in Muncie, so I believe it is important to discuss this organization in this section as well. The 8Twelve Coalition is a neighborhood revitalization coalition convened by Habitat for Humanity. Eight years ago, Habitat was in a Strategic Planning phase. Habitat International had started neighborhood revitalization programs, and the local chapter here was interested. At first, the Habitat chapter in Muncie mostly focused on what we normally recognize Habitat for — building homes. In 2012, they first began to work on neighborhood revitalization. They surveyed the geographic areas of Muncie and evaluated five or six different neighborhoods before choosing the South Side and meeting with the stakeholders in the community. The 8Twelve Coalition is resident-driven, and they build their plans based on resident and organization feedback.

The 8Twelve Coalition has built one garden in Muncie and financially supports two others. My correspondent at the 8Twelve Coalition mentioned that all three gardens operate very differently, but they are all successful because the way that they operate benefits the immediate community and leadership. The garden that they built is near Avondale United Methodist Church, down the street from the Ross Community Center. It is a neighborhood community garden, containing a mix of individual plots and community beds. There is a sign out front saying that the garden is for the community, and that anyone is welcome to have a plot. The Ross Center rented four plots in 2019, but decided not to do so in 2020. The man whose lives next to the garden plants and maintains these plots. I have been told by residents living near the garden that it has not succeeded as a community garden, where neighbors might feel encouraged to spend their time, due to the reserved temperament of the gardener. The gardener still maintains the plots, though, and donates any surplus food to nonprofits. Greater Muncie Habitat for Humanity owns the land.

The 8Twelve Coalition also financially supports the gardens at the Maring-Hunt Library and the Urban Light Community Church, helping them to fundraise. While I have not been able to reach the garden coordinators for these gardens, many local residents praise them as excellent examples of community gardens. At the Maring-Hunt Public Library, there is a Gateway to Gardening Pavilion, which was created in 2017 in collaboration with a Ball State Immersive Learning course, led by Dr. Pam Harwood, Professor of Architecture. The students held neighborhood input sessions, and then designed and built the Pavilion based on the feedback they received. The Gateway to Gardening Pavilion is in a good location as well, next to South View Elementary School and the Wilson School Apartments, which contain affordable apartments for low-income older adults. According to the Maring-Hunt Website, "The Gateway to Gardening Pavilions at Maring-Hunt Library now includes a Kitchen Pavilion, Learning/Market Pavilion, Reading Nook, Nature Play Pockets, a Sand Play Pocket, Bio-Swale with Native Indiana Plants, and Public/Private Gardens." Residents can register to garden a plot for the season at the library's website. Many local residents have praised the Maring-Hunt Gardening Pavilion, both because it is a good gathering space for the community and because it is located near low-income and low-access neighborhoods.

The South Central Community Garden, also supported by the 8Twelve Coalition, is maintained by Urban Light Community Development Corporation. This garden is also an active gathering space for local residents. Many of the residents with whom I have spoken have mentioned this garden, particularly highlighting the play equipment that it contains, and how it is a safe space for families and children. This garden also hosts events to engage the surrounding community, such as an annual Easter Egg Hunt and Fall Cook-Out. On the Urban Light CDC website, it says about that garden that it does "an amazing job proving a beautiful place for neighbors to obtain fresh food and to also engage with one another in neighborhood engagement events… The South Central Community Garden is a fully open community garden – meaning that anyone can participate in and harvest from the garden." Urban Light CDC has also been considering an Adopt-A-Lot program, in which local residents and neighbors would be given a stipend to care for overgrown, vacant lots. This idea was suggested in 2019, so I do not believe they have been able to start such a program yet because of the pandemic. It has the potential to be a successful and innovative program once implemented, though.

Another important community figure to discuss regarding food insecurity and community gardens is Mr. Bob Ball, who founded Blood N Fire (BNF) Ministries and Inside Out with his wife Stacy. BNF was founded in 1995 as an urban missional community church focused on poor populations in Muncie. All of their programs and worship services revolve around food and they include meals in many of their activities. They have after-school and youth programs, beautification plans, a weekly community meal, block parties, outreach, mobile BBQ pits, and disaster relief. They frequently partner with other churches in the community for service

opportunities. BNF also hosts a Christmas gift program every year, in which parents pay $2.50 to buy two Christmas gifts for their child. Ball values the choice that this provides to parents, which he sees as being more dignified than handing predetermined Christmas gifts to parents. At the end of the summer, depending on how the virus progresses, BNF will celebrate its 25-year anniversary. Ball believes strongly that food provides an opportunity to listen to friends and encourage and support them. He sees food and relationships as being intricately tied together.

Inside Out/Fresh Directions was created under BNF in 2011. They hit their stride in 2014, though, when they began providing culinary training. Inside Out also focuses on food, but people whom I know have volunteered there mentioned that it is unique for them because they are not only serving food, but actually helping to make meals from scratch. Inside Out provides meals during holidays to kids, and it took them three years to get their commercial kitchen. The Muncie Mayor helped financially, and even gave Inside Out more money after it was clear the organization was doing well. By now, they have surpassed 375,000 hot meals served.

During the pandemic, stories have been sent to them of food insecurity and the difference that Inside Out makes, so they are still sharing food but doing so safely and with precautions. Mr. Ball would still like to host the junior culinary camp that they were planning on doing this summer, and is considering using online webinars as a format. Inside Out has received two awards in the past from Ball State's Student Voluntary Services, including the Emerging Organization Award when it was first founded, and more recently the Agency of the Year Award. Ball has said that having student support during the academic year through organizations like SVS is a game-changer, and that Inside Out can provide a lot more to their community with student volunteers. As someone who was in SVS during my undergraduate studies, I can personally attest that the other volunteers and Program Coordinators never had a bad word to say about Inside Out, and they all enjoyed volunteering with the organization.

Mr. Ball has started two community gardens locally, which had varying degrees of success. One of these was at Union Chapel. This garden was quite successful, although it has been disbanded because the church did not have enough volunteers or time to continue planting it. Ball was the main person to tend this garden, but as his other programs began expanding, he had to take a step away from this garden. It was successful while in operation, but it is no longer operating due to this. Ball also started a garden in the 800 block of N. Jefferson St., but this garden did not do as well because of issues such as vandalism and theft. During its later years in operation, almost all of the produce was stolen.

<u>Community Agencies Related to Food and Gardening</u>

One particularly innovative food-based organization in Muncie is the Muncie Food Hub Partnership, led by Dr. Joshua Gruver, an associate professor of Natural Resources and Environmental Management (NREM) at Ball State University. MFHP buys food from local producers, such as farms near Muncie, and then sells it to low-income Muncie residents. They have a mobile food market, which they use to travel to areas of Muncie that do not have a grocery store nearby or cannot afford fresh produce. Some Ball State students I have spoken to who have worked with Gruver on this project mentioned that a lot of their work consists of applying for grants, so that the MFHP can afford to pay local producers the full price for their food, but can also keep the costs artificially low for local consumers. This results in the MFHP being quite a good deal for both local producers and local consumers. For producers, this is an excellent way to expand their market because the foods that the MFHP is buying and reselling are often foods that would otherwise go to waste. Many of the foods purchased are ones that the producers would not be able to sell at grocery stores due to various food laws, grocery store policies, and USDA grading scales.

Food waste is both an absurd and serious issue in the U.S., so it deserves some attention if the full impact of MFHP's practices is to be understood. For further information about food waste, the 2014 documentary *Just Eat It: A Food Waste Story*, directed by Grant Baldwin, is an excellent resource that dives into the scale and environmental impact of food waste. Overall, most statistics suggest that around 40% of all food produced in the U.S. goes to waste (Baldwin 2014). Globally, around one-third of all food produced is never eaten (Baldwin 2014).

Much of this waste, as I have suggested, occurs before the food even hits grocery store shelves due to rules pertaining to USDA grading of fruits, vegetables, and other foods. Most meat and produce is graded, and producers typically have to pay fees to the USDA to have their food graded (Linnekin 2016). There is no legal requirement for sellers of food to display the grade of the food, but many grocers will only sell produce and meat that prominently displays a high grade (Linnekin 2016). This is a vicious cycle: because distributors and supermarkets often do not buy the lower classes of foods, consumers have no choice but to purchase the higher ones because other options do not even arrive on the market. All graded foods are edible regardless of their grade, though, and the grade merely reflects "a greater amount of subjectively 'desirable characteristics'" (Linnekin 2016 p. 125). In other words, a fruit or vegetable of a lower grade will likely taste the same as one of a higher grade; the grade conveys the aesthetic appearance of the food, not its nutritional quality.

Producers, however, are still incentivized to waste food that does not meet these requirements because it affects the price they are paid greatly. On an episode of *Last Week Tonight* which focused on food waste, host John Oliver mentioned that a USDA grade of "No. 2" rather than "No. 1" can result in a farmer losing two-thirds of the value of his crop (Last Week Tonight

2015). This is a serious issue. Many Americans are going hungry while we simultaneously waste 40% of our food in this country for appearing "ugly." This issue ties into neoliberalism as well, because the standards that the USDA uses in its grading scales have been developed closely with the food industry, and thus are intended to provide greater profits to large-scale food producers (at the expense of sustainable, small-scale ones) rather than healthier foods to consumers (Linnekin 2016). A staggering amount of food is being thrown away into landfills — creating methane while there, a greenhouse gas far worse than carbon dioxide — because we have created and endorsed an economic system in which it simply is not "profitable" enough to provide that food to those who need to eat. With more innovative programs like the Muncie Food Hub Partnership, we could drastically reduce both food waste and food insecurity in the U.S.

It is also necessary, when discussing the landscape of Muncie's neighborhoods, to include Building Better Neighborhoods and the Muncie Action Plan. Building Better Neighborhoods, under Ball State University, began in 2014. Originally, Ball State had Building Better Communities, but they have since created the Office of Community Engagement, with Building Better Neighborhoods under them. BBN works to connect university resources with community needs. They frequently work alongside the Muncie Action Plan (MAP), particularly Task Force 2, which is concerned with fostering collaboration in the Muncie community. MAP was created in 2009, and it is a grassroots organization that oversees large-scale community planning efforts in Muncie. MAP is community-driven, with the leaders having received community input that they boiled down to five main initiatives, which are their current Task Forces.

BBN and MAP particularly see faith-based organizations taking the lead in the community gardening movement in Muncie, which I have noticed myself through interviews. Another community garden that they praised is the one in the South Central neighborhood, which functions well as a community gathering space and even includes play equipment for children. My correspondent at BBN has noticed that it can be difficult to keep people engaged in community gardens, especially in the summer when the weather becomes much hotter. She noted that neighborhood associations are good at rallying around immediate issues, like food insecurity during the pandemic, but it can be hard to sustain engagement even though food insecurity existed before the pandemic and will continue to exist afterwards.

Another group that is not explicitly focused on gardening but still important is the Healthy Community Alliance. The Healthy Community Alliance is a community-based health organization in Delaware, Blackford, and Jay counties started by IU Health in 2016. They bring community Partners together and encourage these Partners to influence their audiences to "move more, eat better, and smoke less" (John Disher, personal communication). These Partners come from all over the community to reach a wide audience, including churches, factories, libraries

and schools. Even the laundromat in Muncie that I regularly use is a Partner of the Healthy Community Alliance.

Their strategy of reaching more commonplace areas to promote health is unique and intelligent, focusing on reaching people where they are already gathered and places that have audiences already. The old health coalition models often focused on the hospitals, clinics, and the local YMCA, so the populations participating in health-promoting programs are already self-selecting under this model. By spreading their reach through Partners, the benefits of promoting healthy behaviors are spread much further. HCA helps Partners find ways to influence healthier lifestyles in ways that make sense for them as an organization. Perhaps a business, for example, might encourage its employees to take walks on their breaks. Often Partners communicate with each other to share ideas and collaborate. The HCA itself does not complete projects, but they bring Partners together and support their projects. The ultimate goal of HCA is to lessen the impact of chronic disease through networked and engaged community efforts.

The Delaware County Food Council is a spin-off group from the HCA Nutrition Workgroup in Delaware County. The group was created to focus exclusively on local food issues rather than health and nutrition in general. The Delaware County Food Council is now transitioning to be more of a regional Food Council. This group held an informational call-out meeting two years ago, and then began holding brainstorming meetings. They decided to focus on food waste and have been creating a “cheat sheet” document in partnership with the local health department that describes the temperature and labeling requirements as well as “do’s” and “don’ts” for excess food to be donated to food service organizations, such as free meal sites. This document is still in the works but they hope to be able to distribute it to local restaurants, caterers, and food service organizations. The Delaware County Food Council has also been working on Farm to School initiatives and getting local foods, education, and gardens in the local schools. These plans have been put on hold due to COVID-19, though.

The Council serves as a place for camaraderie, information-sharing, and brainstorming. They also support local food service groups like food pantries and free meal sites. In April 2020, the Council invited local foundations and food service organizations who have never attended to discuss local COVID-19 relief funding for food efforts. The Community and Family Services of Blackford and Jay Counties, for example, reached out to the AEP Foundation and received $10,000 for their food pantries. Other groups were able to network and share resources in beneficial ways. For example, two groups were able to create to-go containers for hot meals and grocery boxes, but neither group was able to deliver these. Another group offered their manpower and vehicles to pick up and deliver those food items to people who were homebound.

In May 2020, the Food Council was able to discuss the Prairie Farms milk donation project through the USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program facilitated by the Purdue Extension of Delaware County and the Muncie Food Hub Partnership. The program is six weeks long, and my correspondent has mentioned that around 5,000 gallons of milk have been distributed in Delaware, Randolph, Jay, and Blackford Counties. The Council was a good outlet for sharing information to the community about the free milk opportunity. I have personally seen some of this milk donated to the Ross Center for their Community Market, which many families with children have greatly appreciated. In June 2020, the Council was able to brainstorm logistics and other information for a grant proposal that was being submitted by the Muncie Food Hub Partnership to receive funds to purchase locally grown produce and distribute the produce for free to people who need it in Delaware, Blackford, and Jay Counties. While the Delaware County Food Council does not personally engage much with community gardens, they actively support many of the food relief services in Muncie.

Relationships Among Community Agencies

Through my interviews, I have found that the community agencies in Muncie appear to be rather tight-knit. Food pantries, soup kitchens, churches, community gardens, and community centers in Muncie are communicating and interacting with each other so that they can provide the greatest benefits to their community. Every agency that I spoke to referred me to other community agencies and individuals, and their lists often overlapped. As I have learned through various interviews, the current pandemic and the organization United Way have been important in spurring a lot of collaboration among the community's nonprofit agencies.

When COVID-19 arrived in the U.S. (and particularly in Indiana), many community agencies became worried about being able to provide their services during the pandemic. Individual community agencies were simply not able to operate at the same capacity that they had before the pandemic, even though need increased because of the situation. Around March or April, however, the United Way of Delaware, Henry, and Randolph counties hosted an online video meeting with many of the nonprofits throughout Muncie and Delaware County to discuss how they can collaborate and help each other out during this time. Even if individual nonprofits must operate differently or at a lower capacity, the need for their services within the community still exists, and has in fact increased since the pandemic.

Through this online meeting, many nonprofits have developed closer relationships and found ways to help each other operate so that they can collectively provide the greatest benefits to their community. The Soup Kitchen of Muncie mentioned that the food-based organizations are sharing excess food and helping each other to transport food to various communities. They are

also sharing many cleaning supplies, so that all of the agencies can remain sanitary while providing their services.

Although these relationships have been strengthened recently, there is still room to become closer for the nonprofits in Muncie. The Delaware County Food Council, while relatively new, is an excellent resource for bringing the food-related agencies closer together. As Dr. Gruver has mentioned,

> "Collaborations, partnerships, networks, are the key. Keeping the lines of communication open between all collaborating groups is essential. Otherwise the left arm doesn't know what the right arm is doing. The DelCo Food Council (relatively new group) is doing exactly this – bringing all groups having anything to do with food together to share, discuss, and work toward solutions" (personal communication).

The Urban Garden Coalition also provides many resources to the community gardens around Muncie and Delaware County, but Gruver has mentioned that it would be useful for them to create a position for a single person to be in charge of coordinating all community garden activities around Muncie, so that individual gardens are part of a concerted effort to provide green spaces and produce to the community.

Analysis

This section will contain the perceptions I have gathered from community members regarding community gardens and food insecurity. I have broken down their perceptions into perceived benefits of community gardens, perceived limitations and challenges in community gardens, and perceived solutions to food insecurity.

Perceived Benefits of Community Gardens

When asked about the benefits that community gardens can provide, most local residents initially listed inexpensive fresh produce. The Soup Kitchen of Muncie, for example, has mentioned that they have been given produce from the College Ave United Methodist Church's Mission Garden on a weekly basis. They are also given some of the leftover produce from the weekly Farmers' Market at Minnetrista. Donations like these help the soup kitchen to spread their own food dollars in order to provide more fresh produce and more food overall to their community. The Soup Kitchen of Muncie also values that the community garden at the Maring-Hunt Library is next to an apartment complex for low-income residents, who would not have the space to garden and grow fresh produce otherwise. The Healthy Community Alliance also spoke about the

immediate benefits of being able to provide fresh produce to residents and food pantries within a community.

A correspondent from the Mission Garden has echoed the benefit of providing fresh produce to the community as well. He discussed how the garden leadership does not care if neighbors come through and pick a few vegetables for themselves, as long as it's within reason. Both the Soup Kitchen of Muncie and the Mission Garden give food to Covenant Partners Church on Jackson St., which services many low-income residents. The gardeners at Hazelwood Christian Church, near Ball State University's campus, also outlined fresh produce as the main benefit that their garden provides. They donate most of this produce to other charitable organizations, such as Muncie Mission, Christian Ministries, and the Soup Kitchen of Muncie. Building Better Neighborhoods also mentioned that food is the primary benefit of community gardens, especially during COVID-19 when food production and food systems are on people's minds.

Another benefit that many community gardeners in Muncie have mentioned is socialization. The correspondent at the Mission Garden, for example, has discussed how gardening has created closer social bonds between the church members who volunteer at the garden. They would grow in their gardening experience together, share tips with each other, and teach each other. The current COVID-19 pandemic has made socializing somewhat more difficult for gardeners at the Mission Garden, though. While they used to work together on Saturdays and socialize while gardening, they now have to spread themselves out and maintain distance. They are still operating and maintaining the garden, but they have separated the responsibilities so that one person is in charge of each area. Building Better Neighborhoods also appreciated the community-building and socializing benefits that community gardens can have. It is easier to get to know one's neighbors when working alongside them, such as in a community garden or neighborhood cleanup. HCA echoed this sentiment, suggesting that outside health benefits, community gardens provide community building and engagement, as well as a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Dr. Hanoman at the Ross Community Center has also discussed the socializing benefits of community gardens and how they can work to build community. More than that, however, she ties these benefits in with the ways that community gardens can improve mental and emotional health. Successful community gardens, she says, provide food, foster and strengthen friendships, help create or strengthen bonds, and provide solace and tranquility. They create environments conducive to emotional, mental, and physical health and well-being. If they are well-tended, they can also be a source of beauty, and greenery makes people feel better. Hanoman also saw socialization as the best way to further spread the benefits of community gardens in the neighborhood or community. She mentioned that in order to increase the benefits of a garden, one must have patience with their community and understand their community well. The garden

should be cultivated as a space to cultivate friendships, foster unions, and ease tensions. She was also firm in her belief that the garden must enhance dignity and not be seen as charity in order to accomplish these goals.

Mr. Ball, who runs Blood N Fire Ministries and Inside Out/Fresh Directions with his wife Stacy, is a fan of community gardens and has planted some gardens locally, which have had varying degrees of success. When they are done well, though, he says that they become a place where people can gather, talk, plant, cook, and eat together. Ball is passionate about his belief that food brings people together, so he sees the benefits of food and socialization as being intimately tied together. He has said that the success of a community garden depends on the people involved and the location of the garden. The garden itself needs to be located near people who are willing to take ownership of it, care for it, and share it with each other. There needs to be a concentration of key neighbors who are willing to take care of and monitor the garden. The lack of such key neighbors has sometimes led to theft and vandalism in Ball's experience. Ball would like to buy lots and vacant property so that he can use them to grow food for his programs with BNF and Inside Out.

Mr. Ball has also warned that even successful community gardens can fall away without strong leadership and a core group of people. Union Chapel Ministries in Muncie had a community garden that Ball worked on, which was rather successful. It grew thousands of pounds of food that were given away to various community members and agencies. The issue with the garden, however, was that Ball was the only one taking care of it. He became too busy to continue caring for the garden as his other programs expanded, so he has had to let this garden fall away to pursue his other goals. Ball is somewhat hopeful, however, about the current trend of home gardening during COVID-19. He mentioned that one community garden recently had no seeds because there are so many local people planting their own gardens during this time. While it is unfortunate that this caused a shortage of seeds for a community garden, Ball sees this as a good problem to have. He hopes that more people will have the skills in the future to grow their own food, which would mean more families have greater access to fresh produce and that they spend less of their household budgets on food.

The 8Twelve Coalition also viewed socialization as the greatest benefit that community gardens provide. Their goal through neighborhood revitalization is to build a sense of community, and they see community gardens as providing social cohesion. When I spoke to a representative at the 8Twelve Coalition, she emphasized that food is a secondary benefit of community gardens, but that relationship-building can improve an individual's quality of life. A neighborhood increases in its resilience when neighbors are able to count on each other. The representative also emphasized again that all three gardens that 8Twelve has created or sponsored operate very differently. They all, however, achieve the goal of providing a space for socialization and food in

their neighborhood. She reiterated that there is no single "best" way to run a garden, and there are many ways that a garden can be run well, depending on the needs and desires of the neighborhood.

The Urban Garden Coalition gave perhaps the most holistic answer regarding the benefits that community gardens can provide. They mentioned the benefit of growing food for local people, but also the benefits of being able to connect with nature and neighbors. My correspondent summed up the myriad benefits of community gardens quite well in her statement: "Community gardens can offer education, a meeting space, a way to relax, a way to be physically active, a way to quiet or calm the mind" (Lindsey Cox, personal communication).

The Muncie Food Hub Partnership had many benefits to mention regarding community gardens. Like others, Dr. Gruver mentioned the benefits of strengthened social bonds, personal mental health benefits, and fresh produce. He mentioned that a small garden plot can often produce a lot of food, usually more than people expect. For this reason, he believed they can help to reduce food insecurity in a neighborhood. In his own words, "a community garden can be a place that injects health and nutrients into an area that may not have had these things before. And if they are placed in a community of need – even better. Even better near high density housing, where people can simply walk down the block to be part of the community garden. The community garden near Maring Hunt Library is in a perfect spot" (Josh Gruver, personal communication). Being a professor, Gruver also believed that the educational benefits of gardens were particularly valuable, saying that "people actually learn to garden and grow food and don't have to rely on tail-gates. These educational benefits can be passed on to others too" (personal communication). He also mentioned the historical tradition of farming in Delaware County, and in East Central Indiana more generally, and finished his thoughts by saying that providing food for ourselves and others is "part of our DNA" (Josh Gruver, personal communication).

Perceived Limitations of Community Gardens

Two of the main concerns that community gardens face are weather and water. For the Mission Garden at the College Ave United Methodist Church, there were no utilities so they could not even use a hose to water the garden. At first, the volunteers brought rain barrels to collect rain water and used jugs or buckets to transport the water around the garden. They received a grant in recent years which was used to build a shed that collects and stores rainwater. They have also added solar panels, which help to pump the water as a kind of irrigation system. The usefulness of this shed still depends on the weather and how much it rains, so residents still sometimes have to bring jugs of water from home that they can pour into the shed. Building Better Neighborhoods also discussed the issues surrounding water access and community gardens. Some community gardens have tried to use fire hydrants, but this is not always possible.

Sometimes they pay a neighbor for access to their hose, but not every garden has the resources to do this.

College Ave. United Methodist Church Garden: Shed with solar panels and rain barrels. Phil Engel 2020.

At the Hazelwood Garden, on the other hand, their primary issue is the size of the gardening team itself. Like other congregations, their size has been dwindling in recent years, and the average age of their congregants has been increasing. They do not see very much interest from the immediate neighborhood, since the church is near Ball State's campus and most of their surrounding residences are occupied by college students. They wish to see more engagement and interest in their garden, though, because they have plenty of land to expand on and only lack the labor to do so. The 8Twelve Coalition highlighted this concern as well, stating that the main challenges that they have seen community gardens face is a lack of labor and a lack of ownership. Fortunately, the Hazelwood Church does not have to worry about the latter, but gardens are quite labor-intensive and many community gardens can struggle to find skilled volunteers.

At the Ross Center, Dr. Hanoman felt that there are a few different ways that community gardens can fail. The first is by imposing the garden as a place of charity. The second is having expectations of the garden that are unsubstantiated by the experiences of the neighborhood. The third is by having bad or obnoxious leadership. The person in charge of the garden creates the structure and shapes the politics of the garden. Every garden has some political nature to it regarding who they include and exclude and how social hierarchies form. Hanoman believes that community gardens need leadership of some sort, but she has concerns about how that leadership can be used in political or exclusionary ways. Hanoman has said that it is not easy to create a community garden. Someone looking to start a garden would have to ask their neighbors if they would like a garden and if they would be willing to garden. While community gardens can be essential in under-resourced communities, people should still not start one and expect others to participate unless they have already asked. She recommends starting small and doing your research about the neighborhood. This includes talking to people and explaining what having a community garden would mean in terms of both its benefits and its challenges.

Similarly to Dr. Hanoman, the Healthy Community Alliance viewed building community engagement as one of the biggest barriers to sustaining successful community gardens. Local residents' commitment to the garden is necessary for it to remain successful. They also highlighted the issues of vandalism and theft, but the HCA itself did not care as much about theft. As an organization, their goal is to promote healthy behaviors, so they are not particularly concerned if an individual steals a pumpkin from a garden. If they were vandalizing the garden by smashing pumpkins, that would be of much more serious concern to the HCA. They also pointed out, as others have, the issues of land availability, water accessibility, and having the necessary labor for gardening.

Building Better Neighborhoods spoke about the frustrations of not having land ownership to build a community garden. Many Muncie neighborhoods would like a community garden, but they do not hold collective land and would need the space. There is also the concern of whether someone will come along and dismantle the garden later for more economically productive purposes for the space. This has happened to some gardens in Muncie before, including the North St. garden. Similarly, BBN also mentioned that sustained leadership is a challenge that community gardens face. Neighborhood leaders often come and go. One leader might be incredibly passionate about community gardens, but when they retire the next leader might not care as much and allow the gardens to fall into disrepair. The Urban Garden Coalition echoed this sentiment, stating that the primary challenges for community gardens are sustainability and upkeep. It can be easy for the work to become overwhelming, my correspondent mentioned, because gardens are hard work and require time. A sustainability plan is necessary for the longevity and success of a community garden.

Dr. Gruver with the Muncie Food Hub Partnership was aware of quite a few barriers that community gardens face. Because lots of land has been privatized under neoliberal policy, there is little available public land on which community gardens can be developed. In a post-industrial town like Muncie, clean soil can be hard to come by. Like others, he also mentioned management personnel, funding, general upkeep responsibilities, participant knowledge, tool availability, manager burnout, etc. As a Natural Resources and Environmental Management (NREM) professor at Ball State, Gruver mentioned that having access to a soil scientist and students trained in soil sciences is a good way to mitigate soil issues. Students and faculty are often willing to help out, particularly for the sake of student learning in the NREM department. As has been mentioned previously, Gruver also believes it would be beneficial for the UGC to create a position for someone to coordinate all community garden activities. If a culture of community gardening can be created in Muncie and Delaware County, the benefits from community gardens could be provided in a greater capacity. Overall, Dr. Gruver recognizes many of the real obstacles that community gardeners face, but believes that collaboration and communication are key to overcoming those obstacles.

Perceptions & Solutions Regarding Food Insecurity

Regarding the causes of food insecurity, many locals referred to Muncie's history as a former booming industrial city and the economic decline that followed the loss of these factory jobs. The Soup Kitchen of Muncie discussed how Muncie is in the middle of the rust belt, and the lack of jobs that pay a living wage has led many residents to fall into poverty. The reason people are struggling is ultimately because of the lack of resources, or at least the disproportionate spread of resources. My correspondent at the Soup Kitchen of Muncie outlined how this lack of educational, financial, or psychological resources can lead many to use drugs and alcohol as coping mechanisms, which in turn leads to even worse mental health and financial issues. Dealing with these issues without the proper resources can lead to further dependency on drugs or further mental health issues, which causes poverty and food insecurity to become cyclical and generational issues. Ball from BNF and Inside Out also highlighted the economic situation in Muncie as a reason for widespread food insecurity. He attributed the plight of many Muncie families to the economy, which has now resulted in generational poverty.

In addition to how poverty and a poor economy contribute to food insecurity, many residents also highlighted the lack of grocery stores and the poor spatial concentration of grocery stores in Muncie. My correspondents at the Mission Garden and Building Better Neighborhoods mentioned that around 2017, eight grocery stores closed in Muncie within a year. The Soup Kitchen of Muncie also shared this concern, mentioning that some grocery stores have come into Muncie since the Marsh Supermarkets closed, but they are all concentrated along McGalliard and Tillotson. People who have jobs and children and people who do not have vehicles face

severe restrictions regarding how they can spend the resource of time, which greatly impacts which groceries they can visit. She worries about the fact that the former Marsh and Family Dollar locations around food deserts have not been replaced by other groceries.

The gardeners at Hazelwood Christian Church are aware of the issue of food insecurity, but their discussions of it highlighted the visible signs of food insecurity rather than specific causes. They did mention that poverty and low incomes are among the primary causes of food insecurity, and they also mentioned that they have noticed fewer and fewer grocery stores in Muncie, which has caused an expansion of the food deserts here. My correspondent referred to the fact that a large percentage of Muncie Community Schools students are on Free and Reduced-Price Lunch programs as evidence of the food insecurity situation in Muncie. They also mentioned the long lines that they have seen at distribution centers recently, particularly during the pandemic, and news stories that have come out about Second Harvest's impact during the pandemic. The congregation itself at Hazelwood is also on the schedule to help run Christian Ministries' Food Pantry downtown, where they personally engage in the issue of food insecurity. In terms of the effects of food insecurity, my correspondent mentioned that many families have to make difficult decisions regarding how to spend their limited resources, which often results in purchasing less quality or less healthy foods. They also mentioned that the Muncie Community Schools, because they have to divert some of their resources towards nutrition, have fewer resources to focus on education.

Mr. Ball sees three different areas contributing to food insecurity in Muncie, with the primary one being the economy. Ball, like other collaborators I have spoken to, is aware of the generational poverty present in the community and the economic reasons behind it. Beyond that, however, he also views family dynamics and education as being particularly important regarding food insecurity as well. He asserted correctly that there are fewer two-parent households than there used to be, and the number of single-parent households (particularly single-mother households) is increasing.

Family households account for around 50% of households in Muncie (U.S. Census Bureau 2020). If that 50% is broken down further, about 30% are married couples, 5% have a male head of household with no wife present, and 15% have a female head of household with no husband present (U.S. Census Bureau 2020). In other words, about one-third of family households in Muncie are single-mother households. Further, about 20% of all Muncie families have had an income level below the poverty line within the last year (U.S. Census Bureau 2020). The poverty level in Muncie can be further specified, however, into about 35% for all children under 18 in Muncie, and 40% for single-mother households in Muncie (U.S. Census Bureau 2020). It is difficult to finance a household as a single mother, especially because women in Muncie earn

about half as much per year as the average Indiana woman — around $17,000 in Muncie compared to $32,000 for the Indiana average (U.S. Census Bureau 2020).

Mr. Ball mentioned that it is easier to buy healthy foods for children when a household is supported by two incomes rather than one. Ball also mentioned that education ties into how well-fed a person is, and suggested that education could be a solution for mitigating food insecurity. This includes typical education like attending school, but he also mentioned that education regarding nutrition and cooking is lacking for many younger people right now, possibly discouraging them from exploring fresh produce in their diet.

The 8Twelve Coalition spoke about the pandemic primarily, and how it exposed how much school is a nutritional dependence for children. They mentioned that MCS is still giving meals to students through their buses, and that some residents are delivering food to other residents who cannot get to the bus. Overall, they highlighted how the pandemic has made us more aware of food insecurity in our society, especially for children and older adults.

The Urban Garden Coalition highlighted how Muncie is both a food desert and a food swamp. By food desert, they mean that there is low access to fresh, healthy foods in Muncie except along McGalliard and Tillotson. Muncie has large populations of low-income individuals with little access to transportation, and whose nearest grocery store is over a mile away. By food swamp, they mean that the underserved areas of town (as well as all over Muncie) have lots of fast food and corner stores, like Dollar General, which typically do not have healthy choices. They also pointed to the number of MCS students receiving free breakfasts and lunches as evidence of the food insecurity situation in Muncie.

Regarding the causes of food insecurity, the Urban Garden Coalition pointed to systemic poverty, systemic social inequality, and the fact that Muncie is part of the rust belt, because the loss of factory jobs decades ago still greatly impacts the local economy today. The food service industry and retail industry are large employers in Muncie, but they do not typically pay well. Therefore, many of the jobs available in Muncie are low-paying, and thus many families have adults that work multiple minimum wage jobs and still struggle. There are other jobs available in Muncie, but they require education, special skills, or experience, which not everyone has. Many Muncie residents are also unemployed or underemployed. The official unemployment rate in Muncie is around 5%, but the rate of those over 16 who are not included in the workforce is around 40% (U.S. Census Bureau 2020).[2]

[2] These numbers (and other economic statistics used in this thesis) do not reflect the economic situation during COVID-19. At the time of writing, very little specific data was available for Muncie's economy during the pandemic, aside from the general facts that more people are unemployed and more families are food insecure.

My correspondent at the Urban Garden Coalition finished her thoughts by discussing the stress that accompanies food insecurity. She mentioned that it affects more than just nutrition for our Muncie neighbors; it also affects the mind and physical health. Physical health is compounded by the "stress day after week after month after year, and lack of nutrition affecting physical health" (Lindsey Cox, personal communication). Some families are faced with choosing between paying a bill, keeping a roof over their head, or feeding their family, which is not a choice that anyone should have to make. She concluded with "Everyone has the right to healthy food. It is not a privilege" (Lindsey Cox, personal communication).

The Healthy Community Alliance mentioned that they primarily know about food insecurity in Muncie because of their Nutrition Workgroup, under which the Delaware County Food Council was created. My correspondent at the HCA spoke quite a lot about how zip code and health status are closely correlated. Food insecurity is often related to income and location, which further affects the kinds of grocery stores nearby, educational opportunities available, etc. They also mentioned, along with several other community agencies, how the pandemic has worsened the issue of food insecurity.

The HCA also spoke more about personal choice and personal responsibility than some other community agencies have. They mentioned that low-income individuals often perceive healthy foods to be more expensive. To be fair, they are more expensive in multiple ways. Fresh produce often costs more money than pre-packaged meals, it can go bad if not used quickly, and it requires more time to prepare and cook. The HCA was discussing some of their initiatives to provide more opportunities to purchase produce and to provide more knowledge regarding preparing and cooking meals with fresh produce to low-income families.

The IU Health program Families at the Farmers' Market, which was started 8 years ago, attempted to meet these goals. Their intent was to identify areas with no access to fresh produce, and to identify individuals in those areas who would be interested in attending the Minnetrista Farmers' Market. Those who are interested attend an informative session on a Saturday morning about food, cooking, and health, with a focus on fresh produce. After the session, they are given $20 worth of IU Health Bucks, which they are free to spend at the Farmers' Market, which is open immediately after the informative session. Their hope is that by intentionally engaging these individuals in the Farmers' Market, and by giving them a boost in spending money there, they might learn that perhaps they could afford to include more fresh produce in their weekly diet (albeit with more time and work) than they had imagined previously. Because not everyone has access to transportation, they have also worked on creating carpool schedules to lessen the burdens for anyone who does not have a vehicle. As a volunteer at the Ross Center, I discussed this program with several individuals attending the Community Market, many of whom

expressed excitement and interest, which personally gives me hope for the long-term success of the program.

The Muncie Food Hub Partnership was well aware of the issue of food insecurity in Delaware County and East Central Indiana. Dr. Gruver mentioned that the percentage of food insecure residents in Delaware County hovers around 16-20%, which is higher than the state average for Indiana and also higher than the national average (personal communication). Although he recognized that there are many factors that contribute to food insecurity, the main ones are income, distance to a grocery store (or another food establishment that sells fresh and healthy foods), and access to a vehicle (or some other mode of transportation). Because of these, food insecurity primarily impacts those who are not working, those who do not have a steady income, and those who live far from services and do not own a car. In Muncie, the areas most impacted by food insecurity include central Muncie, the southeast and southwest areas, and the northwest areas. Such low-income and low-access areas already tend to have high-density housing, such as apartment complexes. Gruver mentioned that the MITS bus system can take individuals to stores, but people often have to go to the central bus exchange to get to a store, resulting in long travel times. Additionally, people are limited in how much they can carry on a bus, which limits those shopping for families.

For mitigating food insecurity, local residents and community organizations have given a variety of suggestions and solutions. Many discussed the need for more grocery stores, especially at certain locations in Muncie. The Soup Kitchen of Muncie has suggested that having grocery stores at the former Burlington and Walnut locations would be helpful, as well as a grocery between 12th St. and 8th St. The Mission Garden, rather than mentioning locations where we need groceries, discussed the kinds of groceries that they would like to see in Muncie. My correspondent mentioned that he would like to see more smaller grocers, like “mom and pop” stores. There is the Downtown Farmstand in Muncie, which supplies local organic groceries, but it is too expensive for many of the locals that live near it. As was mentioned previously, the 8Twelve Coalition is trying to start a local coop grocery store at the former Marsh location on Hoyt, but this plan has not materialized yet.

Some individuals mentioned that government programs should be expanded and the economy should be reconceived to better fit residents’ needs. Although they did not use the word “neoliberal” in their discussions, many of the individuals whom I interviewed suggested policies that would be contradictory to a neoliberal political economy, but which would greatly benefit local residents. This suggests that they believe the role of the government should be more of a post-Keynesian one, in which the government intervenes in the business cycle for the welfare and security of citizen-laborers, rather than a neoliberal one in which citizen-consumers provide for themselves under government restrictions.

Gardeners at the Hazelwood Christian Church suggested that government programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) should be expanded. They also mentioned that there may be a need for subsidies to support the operation and prices at groceries in underserved communities, so that locals can still afford food but the grocery store can remain economically viable. Also regarding the economy, Mr. Ball said that we need an economy that supports employment and jobs that pay a living wage so that people can afford healthy foods. He also mentioned that we may need a cultural shift surrounding food, both regarding which foods are seen as desirable as well as viewing food as a right rather than a luxury. Ball is passionate about the rights of kids to have the opportunity to succeed in life, which he believes includes healthy eating.

Dr. Hanoman discussed the issue of education. She mentioned that we could grow all of the fresh produce that we want, but people need to know how to eat it in order for it to make a difference in their lives. There is also the issue that people primarily eat what is familiar to them rather than what is nutritious for them. For this reason, the Rose Park Garden will also host workshops revolving around healthy eating and sharing recipes. She would like this to be reciprocal in nature, too — rather than assuming locals do not know any recipes of their own and only sharing hers, she wants the sharing of recipes and tips to go both ways.

Dr. Hanoman also took a systemic approach to understanding food insecurity. She related food insecurity in Muncie to multigenerational poverty and systemic inequities, including political, socioeconomic, religious, and ethnic inequities. Hanoman said that until we solve systemic inequities, we cannot solve food insecurity, which she defined as the lack of sustained access to fresh food. Hanoman mentioned that there is lots of food in the U.S., but not everyone has access to that food. She was adamant that charity is not a solution: community gardens, soup kitchens, and food pantries — although necessary — are all bandaids on a much larger wound. Although she never used the word “neoliberal,” Hanoman believes, contrary to neoliberal policy, that nonprofits and citizen participation alone cannot fill the void left by decreased government spending on social welfare services. Hanoman’s focus on the dignity of others also suggests that she believes that issues such as access to healthy food will not be solved unless the dignity of others is understood and cherished.

The 8Twelve Coalition highlighted that rather than just curing hunger, the focus for those passionate about food insecurity should be curing the nutritional deficit. Many individuals in Muncie have health-related issues because they cannot access fresh produce, even if they have enough money to not be hungry. As many others have stated, the 8Twelve Coalition mentioned that individuals need the income and resources to affect the market, and the ability to buy what they need and want. Similar to Dr. Hanoman’s view, my correspondent at the 8Twelve Coalition

mentioned that the best case solution for charity is that it is not needed. In other words, governments and markets should be working in tandem to provide benefits to communities, rather than extracting labor and capital from communities without providing living wages.

Building Better Neighborhoods had a similar view, stating that the financial ability to purchase one's own food is key for solving food insecurity. They are particularly excited about the 8Twelve Coalition's plan to develop a food coop, because they believe that food ownership and access is necessary for resolving food insecurity. My correspondent at Building Better Neighborhoods mentioned that she would like to see the community have more of a stake in local sales and purchases, which would provide both more community and more food. Ultimately, she believes that Muncie community members need to have more of a stake in the local food economy than they currently do.

The Urban Garden Coalition discussed how our society needs to work toward ending social inequalities in order to end food insecurity. These include inequalities of race, of privilege, of gender, of sex, of sexual orientation, etc. My correspondent also mentioned the local economic situation, and how Muncie needs better-paying jobs that are accessible to more than a few people. "People deserve access to healthy foods nearby — the grocery store chains and Economic Development offices don't put grocery stores in the areas of Muncie that need it — they continue to flood the most privileged, overserved areas of town" (Lindsey Cox, personal communication). She concluded her thoughts by pointing to the immediate need of food service organizations and the long-term need for political, economic, and social change:

> "The local, amazing efforts of food service organizations, such as food pantries, Second Harvest food bank, free meal sites are needed and appreciated in our community. But I think to reduce food insecurity, large policy, system, and environmental changes need to be made at local, state, and federal levels. Until then, these human service organizations and schools take on the effort of helping feed our community" (Lindsey Cox, personal communication).

The Healthy Community Alliance also spoke about systemic issues, but primarily the system surrounding food waste in the U.S., as the Muncie Food Hub Partnership deals with. They see a need to redirect our food waste stream in positive ways to food insecure communities. There are certainly health and sanitation concerns regarding food donations, but if taken care of appropriately, it can be an innovative idea. My correspondent mentioned Panera Bread as an example of redirecting food waste. Panera Bread serves fresh baked goods every day, and like other bakeries they are required to throw away any unsold food items at the end of the day. Rather than doing so, however, they donate bagels, breads, and desserts that are still edible to nonprofits. This is an example of what a better food system could be like.

The HCA also mentioned that anyone who seriously wishes to address food insecurity must also be ready to seriously address poverty. My correspondent praised Second Harvest Food Bank, because rather than just handing food to individuals, they also engage many community members in financial programs. They often pair up those who are struggling with their income with other community members who are doing relatively better so that financial advice can be shared. The HCA believes that programs that offset the root cause of food insecurity, which is poverty, will go the longest way in addressing both issues. On a somewhat different note from many other community agencies, the HCA also discussed the importance of human behavior. Someone struggling with the stress of poverty might be more likely to buy a pack of cigarettes than a bag of apples, which can compound issues like poverty and food insecurity. While personal responsibility is an important factor as they suggest, poverty and food insecurity cannot be resolved through individual efforts alone, or even through the efforts of individual community agencies.

Dr. Gruver mentioned that while community gardens alone cannot solve food insecurity, they can certainly be part of a suite of solutions. He mainly believes that collaboration, networking, and open communication are key to being able to resolve issues in our community. As mentioned previously, he praised the Delaware County Food Council for doing this by bringing related groups together to share, discuss, and work toward solutions. In April, the Food Council even brought together regional foundations that provide funds to smaller organizations, which resulted (both directly and indirectly) in getting around $30-40,000 to help connect low-income and low-access communities with food resources. Many food-related organizations are becoming accustomed to coming together and discussing issues with each other, and Gruver has said that being able to know what other organizations are doing has been crucial in spreading their mutual benefits.

Dr. Gruver mentioned that there is admittedly a lot of food around Muncie — between gardens, farms, food banks and pantries, etc. The challenge as he sees it is an infrastructural one: getting the food where it needs to go. A farmer may be too busy working farmers' markets and tending their crops to transport a field of tomatoes to communities that need it. Food pantries often rely on volunteers who typically do not have the capacity to pick up and deliver food. This is why he views the Muncie Food Hub Partnership as being so important in managing the local food system in a way that benefits the Muncie and Delaware County communities. The MFHP has the truck, the trailer, and the manpower to make those infrastructural connections, and to transport food from point A to point B.

The MFHP has used a mobile farmers' market to bring fresh and healthy foods to low-income and low-access communities. By applying for grants, they are able to sell the food, which is

mostly produce, at low costs. Like Dr. Hanoman, Dr. Gruver values the dignity of these communities and he recognizes that being able to purchase food (even subsidized food) is far more dignifying than receiving "hand-outs." He also admitted that the pandemic has drastically changed many individuals' situations, and more and more families cannot avoid waiting in long lines for food hand-outs, because they have lost their jobs and income. Gruver praised the Ross Center's Community Market, which serves over 500 people every week. He also discussed the USDA's Healthy Corner Store program, which is an innovative program that connects gas stations and corner stores with farmers to sell local produce in their stores. As someone who values gardening and education, however, he finished his thoughts on food insecurity by mentioning that community gardens and garden education are excellent ways to engage people in growing their own food, thus reducing their household food insecurity.

COVID-19 & The Future

As I am writing, the novel virus COVID-19 is devastating the U.S. economy and public health infrastructure. How are community gardens responding to this crisis? And how should the public more generally respond to such a novel virus? This section will contain a discussion on the pragmatic measures that community garden leaders are taking to maintain health and safety during this public health crisis. It will also discuss the need for community gardens during a time such as this, as well as how urban gardens are responding to this increased need. Finally, this section will include a broader discussion of how we as a society should plan our urban spaces, such as community gardens, for the future. Already many cities across the globe have been redesigning aspects of their urban landscape to better accommodate social distancing and reduce vehicular traffic. As the movement of people and animals across the globe rapidly increases, it is likely that this is not the last novel virus that we will see, and we will have to think as a society about how to plan public spaces in the wake of such an event. How can we foster community while ensuring that people can maintain enough space to stay healthy? During this time, physical distancing may be necessary, but social isolation could be fatal.

Indiana's Essential Businesses

While this virus is devastating our economy and public health, many states and cities across the U.S. have deemed certain businesses and services "essential." "Essential" businesses are allowed to remain open during this pandemic, provided that they ensure the health and safety of their employees (Executive Order 20-22, 2020). They also may be eligible for financial compensation from city, state, or federal governments due to the economic burdens of the pandemic. While I have not reviewed all state's policies regarding "essential businesses," some of Indiana's descriptions may pertain to community gardens, depending on that garden's role. They deem stores that sell groceries and medicine (including farmer's markets and produce stands) as

essential businesses (Executive Order 20-22, 2020). Businesses involved in "food and beverage manufacturing, production, processing, or cultivation" are essential (Executive Order 20-22, 2020). Further, organizations that provide charitable and social services (including food banks and those that provide food to needy individuals), are essential in Indiana (Executive Order 20-22, 2020). Not all community gardens would necessarily fall under one of these categories legally, so for questions regarding the essential nature of a particular garden, I would have to refer that individual to their state's and city's guidelines regarding essential businesses.

Pragmatic Guidelines for Community Gardens During COVID-19

Garden leaders should know how to effectively communicate during this time in order to ensure everyone's safety. Garden leaders should communicate with all potential audiences, including visitors and volunteers, that they should not visit the garden if they feel ill, have tested positive for COVID-19 in the past two weeks, or if they have had contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 in the past two weeks (Seymour et al. 2020). If someone displays symptoms while at the garden, they should be asked to leave. There may need to be a volunteer controlling the entrance of the garden for purposes like this. Garden leaders should ask visitors and gardeners to wear cloth face coverings, especially depending on local guidance (Seymour et al. 2020). If managing a school garden, the garden leader should remind visitors to follow school procedures and/or closures. Garden leaders should communicate to the garden members, volunteers, visitors, and the public of all policy and procedural changes through clear signage, social media, newsletters, etc. (Seymour et al. 2020). Garden leaders should also be sure to establish ongoing communication with their local public health department (Seymour et al. 2020). The CDC says that building strong relationships before an outbreak can help provide an organization with the support and resources needed for an effective response (Seymour et al. 2020).

Many other practices for managing community gardens have to do with ensuring social safety and social distancing. Community gardens should postpone any in-person community events, like potlucks or workshops, to avoid large gatherings of people in the garden (Seymour et al. 2020). The garden gates should be left open during the garden's hours of operation to reduce contact, because gates are a high-contact surface (Seymour et al. 2020). Removing or blocking off public benches and tables should be considered, especially depending on local guidance (Seymour et al. 2020). This can encourage enforcing social distancing guidelines of remaining at least six feet apart from other individuals. Gardens should also limit the number of people in the garden at once to ten people or fewer, and they should stagger times for arrival and availability to reduce the crowd (Seymour et al. 2020).

Garden visitors should wash and/or sanitize their hands before and after visiting the garden (Seymour et al. 2020). They should be sure that they are aware of and are following all new and existing garden policies. They should maintain social distancing and limit their time interacting in the garden (Seymour et al. 2020). Visitors should also minimize contact with high-touch surfaces. Community gardening is more dangerous for one's health during this pandemic than even taking a walk outside, so when in doubt, visitors should stay home (Seymour et al. 2020). This holds particularly true for individuals in vulnerable populations, such as those who are immunocompromised or elderly. When visiting a garden, be sure to visit it alone or with members of one's immediate household (Seymour et al. 2020). If several people are already in the garden, come back later. Visitors should also be sure to remove any and all personal trash or items before leaving the garden, and to wash any produce before eating it (Seymour et al. 2020).

Several precautions should be taken in the garden to ensure that all tools and surfaces remain sanitary. The good news is that COVID-19 is not a foodborne illness, and it is extremely unlikely that someone would contract the virus from eating produce from a community garden (Seymour et al. 2020). Still, one should not eat or drink in a community garden during this pandemic to reduce the likelihood of getting the virus. The illness is contracted by being in very close proximity to others, coming into contact with high-touch surfaces, or by touching one's eyes, nose, or mouth (Seymour et al. 2020). The virus can live for up to three days on surfaces, depending on the material of the surface (Seymour et al. 2020). All gardeners and visitors should take the following precautions, and should not assume that others are following the guidelines.

All surfaces in the garden, but particularly high-touch surfaces (such as gates, doorknobs, water spigots, handles, picnic tables, etc.) should be disinfected on a regular basis (Seymour et al. 20200. Using non-porous plastic surfaces is the best practice, because these surfaces can be most easily disinfected (Seymour et al. 2020). The CDC recommends using disinfectants that are recommended by the EPA, although this list has not necessarily been updated completely for COVID-19. Bleach can work as a disinfectant, but one should use a higher proportion of bleach for COVID-19 than for everyday sanitation (Seymour et al. 2020).

To reduce the spread of the disease, volunteers and gardeners should bring their own tools and gloves, and they should avoid sharing tools and gloves (Seymour et al. 2020). In the event that individuals do not have their own tools, some gardens have decided to assign specific tools and their associated tasks to particular individuals to reduce sharing communal tools (Seymour et al. 2020). Other gardens have asked local businesses for gardening tool donations. Tools should be sanitized before and after use, and gardens should provide stations to do so (Weiland 2020). Volunteers and gardeners, even if they are wearing gloves, should be sure to wash their hands regularly and properly. For this reason, community gardens should provide stations for washing or sanitizing one's hands (Weiland 2020). There are a number of inexpensive ways to do so,

including building one or buying a portable handwashing station (Weiland 2020). Gardens should include signage at such stations with reminders of how to properly wash one's hands (Weiland 2020). Finally, to ensure everyone's health and safety, compost bin lids should not be handled. Garden leaders should consider removing the lids so that gardeners can directly add garden waste to the compost pile (Weiland 2020).

Regarding the health of employees and volunteers, community gardens should follow CDC and FDA guidelines for screening employees who have been exposed to COVID-19. Employees should be screened for symptoms or fever prior to starting work (Seymour et al. 2020). If an employee does have a fever and/or symptoms, they should see a doctor and be referred to their Human Resources department, if applicable (Seymour et al. 2020). It is important to note that during this time, people should still enjoy the outdoors. Community gardens should be open to members, because time outside is still important. The number of the people in the garden at once, however, should be limited to maintain safety. Further, garden members and visitors should avoid isolation during this time. Social distancing is necessary, but social isolation is dangerous (Weiland 2020). The gap in social and personal interaction could be filled by keeping the gardeners engaged through online workshops or weekly newsletters with recipes and stories (Seymour et al. 2020). This time could also be used for organizational and management work that community gardeners may not otherwise have time to complete (Seymour et al. 2020).

For scheduling work, gardens should wait to open as late as is reasonable in order to continue "flattening the curve" (Weiland 2020). If a garden is small, it might be wise to have gardeners schedule when they will work online in order to reduce the number of people present in the garden at any given time (Weiland 2020). A spreadsheet could be used, especially if the garden requires its members to complete shared tasks, so that these are being tracked as well (Weiland 2020). If this is done, garden leaders should be sure to schedule a half-hour break between groups of gardeners so that there is time to wipe down and sanitize all surfaces (Weiland 2020). More vulnerable garden members should be encouraged to stay home. In order to ensure that their plot is still taken care of, other garden members could schedule times to plant or cultivate for them while the risk is still high (Weiland 2020).

Community gardens should use this time to plan ahead for the future. Gardens should be prepared for the possibility that there may be limited access to the garden or gardeners may not be able to come due to illness (Seymour et al. 2020). Gardens should mulch early to prevent weeds and reduce soil moisture loss (Seymour et al. 2020). It would be prudent to consider installing an automatic irrigation system while many gardeners are distancing themselves (Seymour et al. 2020). Gardeners should use row covers for insect control where feasible, and generally stay ahead of seasonal tasks during this uncertain time (Seymour et al. 2020).

An important aspect of retaining the community aspect of community gardens is staying engaged and supporting one's fellow gardeners. Gardens are social centers for many people, and social distancing should not lead to social isolation. Garden managers could use a website, online conferencing, listservs, social media, or newsletters to maintain social connections during this time (Weiland 2020). These formats could include stories and profiles of gardeners, tips and strategies shared by gardeners, recipes, photos of home gardens and gardens from previous years, etc. (Weiland 2020). Garden leaders could also consider offering online webinars on gardening topics rather than their typical in-person workshops. Because these are online, there may be more opportunities or availability to feature gardening experts who may not be able to come to an in-person workshop (Weiland 2020). Gardeners should maintain regular and timely communication, and ensure that everyone is up-to-date on the current guidelines. Gardener communication should be encouraged online, such as through email or social media groups (Seymour et al. 2020). They could share resources and inspiration to keep each other hopeful and engaged during this time. Community gardens are a source of social support and interaction for many populations that are already more isolated (such as immigrants and retirees), and they should try to remain so even if they cannot socialize in person.

Increased Need for Community Gardens During COVID-19

Many community gardens have been opening regardless of their state's stay-at-home policies or whether they are deemed "essential services." This is because these gardens often are essential, whether their state recognizes them as such or not. The Tehuti Ma'at Community Garden in Brooklyn reopened in April despite Governor Cuomo's stay-at-home order (Wharton 2020). This garden is one of the 553 "Green Thumb" gardens in New York City. All of these gardens closed on March 21, but residents near them still need food because many stores have closed (Wharton 2020). Additionally, this garden also opened early in recognition of the fact that people need an open space to be able to hang out (Wharton 2020). In a city where residents are primarily housed in apartments, this need is even more crucial.

The Wareham Community Garden in Massachusetts was considering closing, and the leader posted her plans on a couple of listservs focused on food and farming. She immediately received messages and emails about the importance of fresh produce for low-income populations, especially during this pandemic (Wharton 2020). She has begun compiling pandemic advice for community gardeners, much of which I have borrowed from here. The director of Sprout Nola, a nonprofit in New Orleans, believes that there will be a day when gardens have to replace stores altogether (Wharton 2020). She has implemented safety and sanitation rules and has started delivering boxes of food to people who cannot leave their homes right now (Wharton 2020). Sprout Nola has also started growing more food to meet the increased need during this time, putting in additional plants at two abandoned community gardens in the city (Wharton 2020).

They have also begun an innovative program of asking home gardeners to grow seedlings at home, while they maintain a spreadsheet of people who have requested those foods (Wharton 2020).

Our Neighbors Farm & Pantry have seen an increase in their visits to their food pantry as well as their harvest-your-own programs (Wharton 2020). Alemany Farm in San Francisco has seen similar trends. More people are coming to their pick-your-own events, and there is an increased need in the food pantry that they supply to (Wharton 2020). They are worried about being able to keep up with this increased demand, though, because they must work fewer hours and have fewer volunteers working at once. The DeKalb County Community Gardens in Illinois have seen over a 500% increase in food insecurity and need for their produce due to the economic burdens residents have faced because of COVID-19 (Rettke 2020).

There are also new community gardens emerging because of COVID-19. Residents across Dallas County have been planting community gardens (West 2020). Their first community garden was planted at a local school last year with the help of United Way (West 2020). That garden is limited in the services it can provide and the number of people it can hold due to COVID-19, so other community organizations began planting gardens with the support of Dallas County and the local residents. Van Meter United Methodist Church was one such organization, and they donate 100% of their produce to those in need (West 2020). Another community garden has been started in the Riverside community in the north-west side of Indianapolis. This area is considered a food desert, and lost its only grocery store years ago (Newsome 2020). The KHEPRW Institute helped them create a community garden there (Newsome 2020). Support from neighbors came almost immediately, when neighbors began helping the garden coordinator to pick up trash to clear space (Newsome 2020). Many have stopped throwing their own trash on the street as well (Newsome 2020). This shows that building community gardens this time can help to build community, and not just provide food. The goal of this garden is to help area residents become self-sustaining during this time by teaching them how to grow and cook their own food.

The Future of Public Spaces

Many cities across the world are now working to reconfigure their public spaces in the wake of the pandemic. The Athens Municipal Council, for example, approved a plan recently to change Athens' urban landscape due to the virus (Kalias 2020). London, Berlin, and Bogota have been discussing similar changes as well. In Athens, their current goals are to increase the amount of public space in this urban center so that people can more effectively practice social distancing (Kalias 2020). This will include creating more structures like benches and putting more plants in open space (Kalias 2020). They also intend to give more priority to bicyclists and pedestrians rather than automobiles to protect both public health and the environment by discouraging a fully

car-dominated city and decongesting public transportation (Kalias 2020). The new walkway that they are planning will connect Athens' historic center with some of their most famous archaeological sites (Kalias 2020). Ultimately, Athens is admirably trying to answer the question of how we should plan our cities with this pandemic and potential future viruses in mind. Community gardens should be a critical part of the discussion over the future of public spaces.

During this time, community gardens should maintain their commitment to being a community space in addition to providing produce to communities hit by economic hardships. How can a community space be maintained with social distancing guidelines in place, though? A few quick recommendations result from the comprehensive list of best practices earlier. All community gardens should have handwashing stations or hand sanitizer available to all visitors and gardens. Public in-person events should be canceled. Gardens should instead seek online platforms for encouraging and creating community during this time. If a garden does remain open, priority of access should be given to those working in the garden. People should be allowed to visit garden sites for relaxation and time outdoors, but they should follow specific guidelines in doing so. Visitors to gardens should ensure that the number of people in the garden does not exceed the limit needed to maintain six feet between all individuals. Additionally, visitors and gardeners alike should wear gloves and masks, wash their hands frequently, and sanitize all tools, equipment, and surfaces.

In a world of ever-increasing speed and expanded mobility of human and nonhuman animals, this will not be our last novel virus or pandemic. We must reimagine our public spaces so that spaces such as community gardens can remain viable in the future. Even in a world of viruses, people still need to eat. Community gardens, home gardens, and food pantries can be excellent ways of providing local residents with enough food when grocery stores are closed or farmers cannot find enough processing plants to which they can sell their meat or produce. We must consciously plan public spaces in a way that encourages people to be outdoors without putting their safety at risk. Masks and gloves should be encouraged for the time being. Perhaps the U.S. could take a note from Athens and create more space for pedestrians and bicyclists and reduce car traffic and our nation's dependence on automobiles. We could create more public benches, with distance between them, accompanied by regular sanitation and public handwashing stations. These are all excellent ideas, but I urge city and regional planners to consider public spaces comprehensively during this time, including the benefits that spaces such as community gardens can provide. We must find ways to remain communally engaged even as our ability to be physically near each other has greatly diminished.

Conclusion

Many local organizations clearly see the need for food relief services and community gardens, and they provide great benefits to their communities through these initiatives. These initiatives can be radical in that they are grassroots-driven, and are intended solely to benefit the local community. By taking up the responsibility of ensuring residents' welfare, however, these organizations also have the capacity to further entrench certain aspects of neoliberalism.

Governments (local, state, and federal) are more justified in not taking care of their citizens when there are nonprofits and community-driven initiatives to fill the gaps. Although the individuals and organizations caring for their communities are justified and are simply doing what is right in the moment, there should be a greater demand overall for governments to shoulder more responsibility for citizen welfare, as our governments did under Keynesianism and the New Deal era. Community gardens and nonprofit agencies also frequently have to work under a neoliberal framework in order to survive, and often must become neoliberal in some ways themselves. This could include, for example, unintentionally setting up hierarchies that reflect existing race- and class-based hierarchies under neoliberalism. Many gardeners also view governments and financial institutions as potential allies rather than threats, so they become increasingly pragmatic instead of confrontational, often limiting the ability for organizations concerned about food insecurity to advocate for wider policy changes related to this issue.

Ultimately, Muncie needs food. Individual nonprofits do not have the capacity to fill this need entirely. Although it may not seem attractive to the Muncie government to create grocery stores where they are not necessarily profitable, the profitability (or lack thereof) of groceries should not obscure the localized need for those stores. Additionally, Muncie citizens deserve wages that support their lives. Any business that cannot afford to pay employees what they are worth (and every human being deserves enough money to live safely and healthily) does not deserve to be in business, regardless of the GDP they help provide to the city or state. I also believe that citizens should begin viewing their governments (at all levels) as the main channel for political and economic change and action, rather than consumerism, participatory citizenship and community-driven initiatives alone. Community-driven initiatives that are aimed at voicing citizens' concerns to their government officials can be wonderfully democratic, but those that become compliant in the face of neoliberal policy can further entrench structural flaws that limit the availability of food and livable wages.

This research additionally speaks to the need to employ more anthropologists and social scientists in prominent political and economic institutions, particularly as researchers and decision-makers. It is certainly necessary to rely at least somewhat on aggregate data when governing large populations, as is the case in the U.S. Even so, however, those data and numbers cannot completely reflect peoples' lived realities. In order to truly ensure citizen welfare, rather

than market welfare alone, it is necessary for the social sciences to hold as much importance as political science and economics in governing institutions.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Questions asked about specific community gardens:

1. When was this garden created, and why?
2. Is this garden in operation right now (during COVID-19)?
3. Do you consider this garden to be a community garden? Why or why not?
4. What is grown in this garden? What percent of the garden grows edible foods?
5. What is done with the produce grown and harvested here?
6. What benefits does this garden provide to the neighborhood/community?
7. What challenges does this garden face, if any?

Questions asked about community gardens and food insecurity in general:

1. What benefits do you believe community gardens provide to their communities?
2. What limitations or challenges do you believe community gardens face?
3. What do you know about food insecurity in Muncie? What causes food insecurity? What effects does it have on an individual, family, or community?
4. What solutions do you believe are necessary to reduce food insecurity?

Readers may notice that interviewees were not asked questions regarding neoliberalism specifically. This is because the focus on neoliberalism was added after several residents mentioned in their responses regarding solutions to food insecurity that they believe their governments should play a greater role in community and family welfare. It should be noted that none of the residents specifically used the term “neoliberal” in these responses; the emphasis on neoliberal capitalism was the author’s interpretation of interviewee responses.